/823.8M36F>C1/

26544

823.8
M36f

Martineau
Feats on the Fjord, and
Merdhin

**North Central College Library**

NAPERVILLE, ILL.

Books, except reserve books, may be kept one week, with privilege of renewal for like period, unless otherwise specified by librarian.

Five cents is charged for each day a book is kept overtime.

Reserve books may be drawn one half hour before closing and are due one half hour after the next opening of the library.

Five cents is charged for each hour a reserve book is kept overtime.

# Date Loaned

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| NOV 13 '56 | | | |
| OCT 1 6 1972 | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
|

EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY
EDITED BY ERNEST RHYS

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

North Central College Library
Naperville, Illinois

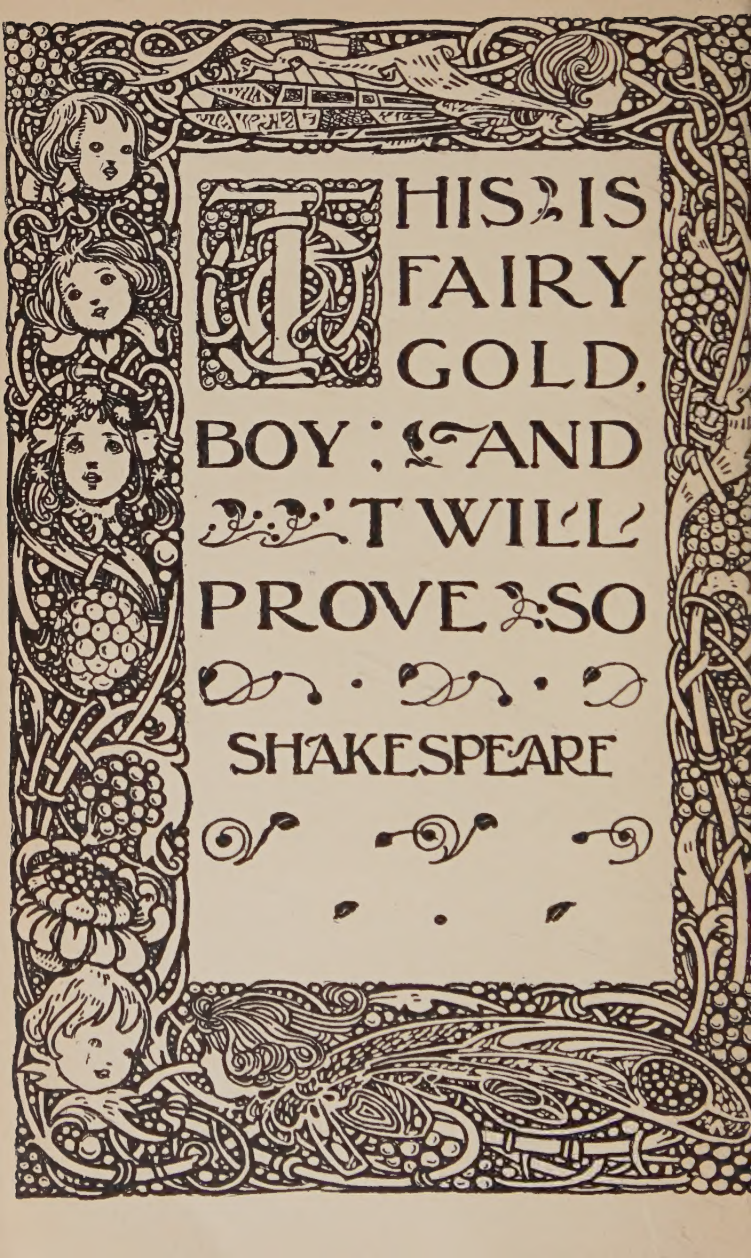
FEATS ON THE FIORD
AND MERDHIN · BY
HARRIET MARTINEAU

THIS IS NO. 429 OF *EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY*. THE PUBLISHERS WILL BE PLEASED TO SEND FREELY TO ALL APPLICANTS A LIST OF THE PUBLISHED AND PROJECTED VOLUMES ARRANGED UNDER THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS:

TRAVEL ❦ SCIENCE ❦ FICTION
THEOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY
HISTORY ❦ CLASSICAL
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
ESSAYS ❦ ORATORY
POETRY & DRAMA
BIOGRAPHY
REFERENCE
ROMANCE

THE ORDINARY EDITION IS BOUND IN CLOTH WITH GILT DESIGN AND COLOURED TOP. THERE IS ALSO A LIBRARY EDITION IN REINFORCED CLOTH

LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.


THIS IS
FAIRY
GOLD,
BOY: AND
'T WILL
PROVE SO
SHAKESPEARE

# FEATS *on the* FJORD *and* MERDHIN *by* HARRIET MARTINEAU

LONDON & TORONTO
PUBLISHED BY J·M·DENT
& SONS LTD & IN NEW YORK
BY E·P·DUTTON & CO

First Issue of this Edition . 1910
Reprinted. . . . . 1915, 1922, 1927

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

26544

# INTRODUCTION

HARRIET MARTINEAU worked and wrote hard in her day for many causes, some of them labelled with very formidable names. But she is best remembered now by a younger generation as the author who wrote the tales which she grouped under the entertaining title of *The Playfellow*. The chief favourite among these—there were four of them in all—was the following latter-day saga of the Norwegian seaboard and mountain-sides, *Feats on the Fiord*. To this is added *Merdhin*, the first and best of the cycle of tales which she had undertaken in order to further the reform of the hard laws weighing on land and people—*Forest and Game-Law Tales*. She had already published another series of stories which was better than it sounds to-day — *Illustrations of Political Economy*. After her visit to America, where she entered with ardour into the cause of the slaves, she returned home with a travel-book, *A Retrospect of Western Travel*, in which she helped to rouse the sympathies of England in the struggles of the Abolitionists. *Deerbrook*, a novel of English country life, showed in turn the range of her powers in serious romance. Her deafness and her delicate health, which threatened to shut her off from active life, and caused her trouble all through her working days, never really hindered her. She worked on bravely and indefatigably to the end, and contrived to see more of the world and its famous folk than falls to the lot of most women, even now when steam and electricity have reduced the Atlantic and the bordering continents to an easy compass. Her own ideas of her work and her faculty for carrying it through were set down with almost arithmetical modesty. "Her original power," she said, "was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive

powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see and give a clear expression to what she had to say. In short, she could popularise while she could neither discover nor invent."

Harriet Martineau was born at Norwich, of old Huguenot stock, in 1802; and died at the Knoll, Ambleside, the home of her later years, in 1876.

E. R.

The following is a list of Harriet Martineau's published works:—

Devotional Exercises, with a guide to the study of the Scriptures, 1823, 1832; Addresses, with Prayers and Original Hymns, 1826; Traditions of Palestine, 1830, 1870; Five Years of Youth, or Sense and Sentiment, 1831; Essential Faith of the Universal Church, 1831; The Faith, as unfolded by many prophets . . . addresses to the disciples of Mohammed, 1832; Providence as manifested through Israel (Prize Essay, Unitarian Society), 1832; Illustrations of Political Economy, 1832, 1833, 1834; Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated, 1833; Illustrations of Taxation, 1834; Society in America, 1837; Retrospect of Western Travel, 1838; How to Observe: Morals and Manners, 1838; Deerbrook, a novel, 1839; The Martyr Age of the United States, 1840; The Playfellow, a series of tales (including Feats on the Fiord, Crofton Boys, etc.), 1841; The Hour and the Man, an historical romance, 1841, 1904 (Half-forgotten Books); Life in the Sick Room: Essay by an Invalid, 1844; Letters on Mesmerism, 1845; Forest and Game-Law Tales, 1845; Dawn Island, a tale (published for the Anti-Corn Law League), 1845; The Billow and the Rock (Knight's weekly volumes), 1846; The Land we live in, with C. Knight and others, 1847, etc.; Eastern Life, Past and Present, 1848, illustrated edition, 1875; History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace, 1816-1846, 1849; Household Education, 1849; Introduction to the History of the Peace from 1800-15, 1851; Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (with H. G. Atkinson), 1851; Half a Century of the British Empire, 1800-50, 1851; Merdhin, The Manor and the Eyrie, and Old Landmarks and Old Laws, 1852; Letters from Ireland (from the *Daily News*), 1853; The Philosophy of Comte, freely translated and condensed, 1853, 1875 (Bohn's Philological Library), 1896; A Complete Guide to the English Lakes, 1855, later editions with illustrations; The Factory Controversy: a Warning against "Meddling Legislation," 1855; A History of the American Compromise (from *Daily News* with additions), 1856; Sketches from Life, 1856; Corporate Traditions and National Rights, Dues on Shipping, 1857; British Rule in India, an historical Sketch, 1857; Suggestions towards the Future Government of India, 1858; England and her Soldiers, 1859; Health, Husbandry, and Handicraft, 1861; Biographical Sketches (from the *Daily News*), 1869, fourth ed. 1876; The Hampdens, an historiette, illustrated by Millais, 1880.

Life: Autobiography, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman, 1877; Mrs. Fenwick Miller (Eminent Women Series), 1884.

# CONTENTS

## FEATS ON THE FIORD


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | Erlingsen's "at Home" | 1 |
| II. | Oddo's Walk | 22 |
| III. | Olaf and his News | 34 |
| IV. | Roving here and roving there | 49 |
| V. | The Water-Sprites' Doings | 59 |
| VI. | Spring | 71 |
| VII. | Vogel Islet | 84 |
| VIII. | A Summer Apartment | 91 |
| IX. | Hund's Report | 103 |
| X. | Seeking the Uplands | 113 |
| XI. | Dairy-Maids' Talk | 126 |
| XII. | Peder Abroad | 132 |
| XIII. | Plot and Counterplot | 146 |
| XIV. | Midnight | 159 |
| XV. | Mountain Fare | 168 |
| XVI. | Old Tales and Better Tidings | 179 |
| XVII. | The Watch on the Hill | 186 |
| XVIII. | To Church | 191 |


## MERDHIN


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I. | A Lord Dane on a Visit | 199 |
| II. | Night by the Fold | 209 |
| III. | Trespass | 216 |
| IV. | Surrender by Bail | 222 |
| V. | The Swoop of the Raven | 227 |
| VI. | Kingly Duty and Kingly Sport | 231 |
| VII. | Penance and Peace | 238 |

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


PAGE

ERLINGSEN AND SOME OF HIS SERVANTS STOOD WITH LIGHTED PINE-TORCHES TO RECEIVE THEIR GUESTS . . . 9

IT CAME NEARER AND NEARER, AND AT LAST QUITE UP TO THE CAN OF ALE . . . . . 25

IN THE PORCH SHE FOUND ODDO EATING SOMETHING WHICH CAUSED HIM TO MAKE FACES . . . . . 45

THE POOR ANIMAL STRUGGLED VIOLENTLY . . . 51

AND THAT VESSEL, HE KNEW, WAS THE PIRATE SCHOONER . 87

HE SOMETIMES HAMMERED A LITTLE AT HIS SKIFF . . 99

NO OTHER THAN THE MOUNTAIN-DEMON . . . . 117

AT THE END OF A LEDGE HE FOUND THE REMAINS OF A LADDER MADE OF BIRCH-POLES . . . . 139

IN DESPERATION HUND, UNARMED AS HE WAS, THREW HIMSELF UPON THE PIRATE . . . . . 153

IT WAS HUND, WITH HIS FEET TIED UNDER HIS HORSE, AND THE BRIDLE HELD BY A MAN ON EACH SIDE . . 175

AS PRETTY A BOAT PROCESSION ON THE STILL WATERS OF THE FIORD AS HAD EVER BEFORE GLIDED OVER ITS SURFACE . . . . . 193

# FEATS ON THE FIORD

North Central College Library
Naperville, Illinois

# FEATS ON THE FIORD

## CHAPTER I

### ERLINGSEN'S "AT HOME"

EVERY one who has looked at the map of Norway must have been struck with the singular character of its coast. On the map it looks so jagged, such a strange mixture of land and sea, that it appears as if there must be a perpetual struggle between the two—the sea striving to inundate the land, and the land pushing itself out into the sea, till it ends in their dividing the region between them. On the spot, however, this coast is very sublime. The long straggling promontories are mountainous, towering ridges of rock, springing up in precipices from the water; while the bays between them, instead of being rounded with shelving sandy shores, on which the sea tumbles its waves, as in bays of our coast, are, in fact, long narrow valleys, filled with sea, instead of being laid out in fields and meadows. The high rocky banks shelter these deep bays (called fiords) from almost every wind; so that their waters are usually as still as those of a lake. For days and weeks together, they reflect each separate tree-top of the pine-forests which clothe the mountain sides, the mirror being broken only by the leap of some sportive fish, or the oars of the boatman as he goes to inspect the sea-fowl from islet to islet of the fiord, or carries out his nets or his rod to catch the sea-trout, or char, or cod, or herrings, which abound, in their seasons, on the coast of Norway.

It is difficult to say whether these fiords are the most beautiful in summer or in winter. In summer, they glitter with golden sunshine; and purple and green

shadows from the mountain and forest lie on them; and these may be more lovely than the faint light of the winter noons of those latitudes, and the snowy pictures of frozen peaks which then show themselves on the surface: but before the day is half over, out come the stars—the glorious stars, which shine like nothing that we have ever seen. There, the planets cast a faint shadow, as the young moon does with us; and these planets and the constellations of the sky, as they silently glide over from peak to peak of these rocky passes, are imaged on the waters so clearly that the fisherman, as he unmoors his boat for his evening task, feels as if he were about to shoot forth his vessel into another heaven, and to cleave his way among the stars.

Still as everything is to the eye, sometimes for a hundred miles together along these deep sea-valleys, there is rarely silence. The ear is kept awake by a thousand voices. In the summer, there are cataracts leaping from ledge to ledge of the rocks; and there is the bleating of the kids that browse there, and the flap of the great eagle's wings, as it dashes abroad from its eyrie, and the cries of whole clouds of sea-birds which inhabit the islets; and all these sounds are mingled and multiplied by the strong echoes, till they become a din as loud as that of a city. Even at night, when the flocks are in the fold, and the birds at roost, and the echoes themselves seem to be asleep, there is occasionally a sweet music heard, too soft for even the listening ear to catch by day. Every breath of summer wind that steals through the pine-forests wakes this music as it goes. The stiff spiny leaves of the fir and pine vibrate with the breeze, like the strings of a musical instrument, so that every breath of the night-wind, in a Norwegian forest, wakens a myriad of tiny harps; and this gentle and mournful music may be heard in gushes the whole night through. This music, of course, ceases when each tree becomes laden with snow; but yet there is sound, in the midst of the longest winter night. There is the rumble of some avalanche, as, after a drifting storm, a mass of snow too heavy to keep its place slides and tumbles from the mountain peak. There is also, now and then, a loud crack of the ice in the nearest glacier;

and, as many declare, there is a crackling to be heard by those who listen when the northern lights are shooting and blazing across the sky. Nor is this all. Wherever there is a nook between the rocks on the shore, where a man may build a house, and clear a field or two;—wherever there is a platform beside the cataract where the sawyer may plant his mill, and make a path from it to join some great road, there is a human habitation, and the sounds that belong to it. Thence, in winter nights, come music and laughter, and the tread of dancers, and the hum of many voices. The Norwegians are a social and hospitable people; and they hold their gay meetings, in defiance of their Arctic climate, through every season of the year.

On a January night, a hundred years ago, there was great merriment in the house of a farmer who had fixed his abode within the Arctic circle, in Nordland, not far from the foot of Sulitelma, the highest mountain in Norway. This dwelling, with its few fields about it, was in a recess between the rocks, on the shore of the fiord, about five miles from Saltdalen, and two miles from the junction of the Salten's Elv (river) with the fiord. It was but little that Erlingsen's fields would produce, though they were sheltered from the coldest winds, and the summer sunshine was reflected from the rocks, so as to make this little farm much more productive than any near, which were in a more exposed situation. A patch of rye was grown, and some beans and oats; and there was a strip of pasture, and a garden in which might be seen turnips, radishes, potatoes, lettuce, and herbs, and even some fruits—a few raspberries, and a great many cherries. There were three or four horses on the farm, five cows, and a small flock of goats. In summer, the cattle and flock were driven up the mountain, to feed on the pastures there; and during the seven months of winter, they were housed and fed on the hay grown at home, and that which was brought from the mountain, and on a food which appears strange enough to us, but of which cows in Norway are extremely fond—fish-heads boiled into a thick soup with horse-dung. At one extremity of the little beach of white sand which extended

before the farmer's door was his boat-house; and on his boat he and his family depended, no less than his cows, for a principal part of their winter subsistence. Except a kid or a calf now and then, no meat was killed on the farm. Cod in winter, herrings in spring, trout and salmon in summer, and salted fish in winter, always abounded. Reindeer meat was regularly purchased from the Lapps who travelled round among the settlements for orders, or drove their fattened herds from farm to farm. Besides this, there was the resource of game. Erlingsen and his housemen brought home from their sporting rambles, sometimes a young bear, sometimes wild ducks, or the noble cock-of-the-woods, as big as a turkey, or a string of snipes, or golden plovers, or ptarmigan. The eggs of sea-birds might be found in every crevice of the islets in the fiord, in the right season; and they are excellent food. Once a year, too, Erlingsen wrapped himself in furs, and drove himself in his sledge, followed by one of the housemen on another and a larger, to the great winter fair at Tronyem, where the Lapps repaired to sell their frozen reindeer meat, their skins, and few articles of manufacture, and where travelling Russian merchants came with the productions of other climates, and found eager customers in the inhabitants who thronged to this fair, to make their purchases. Here, in exchange for the salt-fish, feathers, and eider-down which had been prepared by the industry of his family, Erlingsen obtained flax and wool wherewith to make clothing for the household, and those luxuries which no Norwegian thinks of going without—corn-brandy, coffee, tobacco, sugar, and spices. Large mould candles were also sold so cheap by the Russians that it was worth while to bring them home for the use of the whole family—even to burn in the stables and stalls, as the supply of bear's fat was precarious, and the pine-tree was too precious, so far north, to be split up into torches, while it even fell so short occasionally, as to compel the family to burn peat, which they did not like nearly so well as pine-logs. It was Madame Erlingsen's business to calculate how much of all these foreign articles would be required for the use of her household for a whole year; and, trusting to her calculations, which were never

found to be wrong, her husband came home from the winter fair heavily enough laden with good things.

Nor was it only what was required for his own every-day household that he brought. The quantity of provisions, especially corn-brandy, tobacco, coffee, and sugar, consumed in hospitality in Norway, is almost incredible; and, retired as the Erlingsens might appear to dwell, they were as hospitable, according to their opportunities, as any inhabitant of Bergen or Christiania. They gave feasts at Christmas, and on every occasion that they could devise. The occasion, on the particular January day mentioned above, was the betrothment of one of the house-maidens to a young farm-servant of the establishment. I do not mean that this festival was anything like a marriage. It was merely an engagement to be married; but this engagement is a much more formal and public affair in Norway (and indeed wherever the people belong to the Lutheran church) than with us. According to the rites of the Lutheran church, there are two ceremonies—one when a couple become engaged, and another when they are married. In Norway, this betrothment gives the couple a certain dignity beyond that of the unengaged, and more liberty of companionship, together with certain rights in law. This makes up to them for being obliged to wait so long as they often must before they can marry. In a country scattered over with farmers, like Norway, where there are few money transactions, because people provide for their own wants on their own little estates, servants do not shift their places, and go from master to master, as with us. A young man and woman have to wait long—probably till some houseman dies or removes, before they can settle; and then they are settled for life—provided for till death, if they choose to be commonly industrious and honest. The story of this betrothment at Erlingsen's will explain what I have just said.

As Madame Erlingsen had two daughters growing up, and they were no less active than the girls of a Norwegian household usually are, she had occasion for only two maidens to assist in the business of the dwelling and the dairy.

Of these two, the younger, Erica, was the maiden betrothed to-day. No one perhaps rejoiced so much at the event as her mistress, both for Erica's sake, and on account of her own two young daughters. Erica was not the best companion for them; and the servants of a Norwegian farmer are necessarily the companions of the daughters of the house. There was nothing wrong in Erica's conduct or temper towards the family. She had, when confirmed,[1] borne so high a character that many places were offered her, and Madame Erlingsen had thought herself very fortunate in obtaining her services. But, since then, Erica had sustained a shock which hurt her spirits, and increased a weakness which she owed to her mother. Her mother, a widow, had brought up her child in all the superstitions of the country, some of which remain in full strength even to this day, and were then very powerful; and the poor woman's death at last confirmed the lessons of her life. She had stayed too long, one autumn day, at the Erlingsen's; and, being benighted on her return, and suddenly seized and bewildered by the cold, had wandered from the road, and was found frozen to death in a recess of the forest which it was surprising that she should have reached. Erica never believed that she did reach this spot of her own accord. Having had some fears before of the Wood-Demon having been offended by one of the family, Erica regarded this accident as a token of his vengeance. She said this when she first heard of her mother's death; and no reasonings from the zealous pastor of the district, no soothing from her mistress, could shake her persuasion. She listened with submission, wiping away her quiet tears as they discoursed; but no one could ever get her to say that she

[1] The rite of confirmation is thought much more of in Norway than with us. The preparation for it is longer and more strict; and the destiny of young people for life depends much on how they pass through it. A person who has not been confirmed is looked upon as one without a charatcer and without knowledge; while those who pass well stand high in credit; and, if they have to earn their living, are sure of good situations. In the newspapers in Norway you may see among the advertisements, "A *confirmed* shop-boy wants a place." "Wanted, a *confirmed* girl who can cook;" which means that their having been confirmed proves that they are considered respectable, and not deficient in capacity or knowledge.

doubted whether there was a Wood-Demon, or that she was not afraid of what he would do if offended.

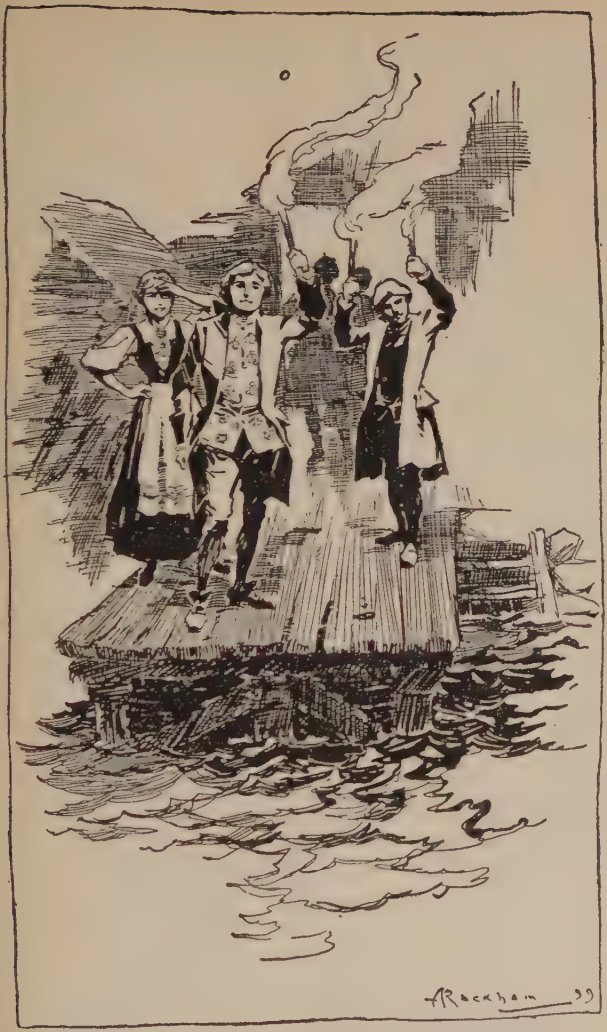
Erlingsen and his wife always treated her superstition as a weakness; and when she was not present, they ridiculed it. Yet they saw that it had its effect on their daughters. Erica most strictly obeyed their wish that she should not talk about the spirits of the region with Orga and Frolich; but the girls found plenty of people to tell them what they could not learn from Erica. Besides what everybody knows who lives in the rural districts of Norway—about Nipen, the spirit that is always so busy after everybody's affairs—about the Water-Sprite, an acquaintance of every one who lives beside a river or lake—and about the Mountain-Demon, familiar to all who lived so near Sulitelma; besides these common spirits, the girls used to hear of a multitude of others from old Peder, the blind houseman, and from all the farm-people, down to Oddo, the herd-boy. Their parents hoped that this taste of theirs might die away if once Erica, with her sad, serious face and subdued voice, were removed to a house of her own, where they would see her supported by her husband's unfearing mind, and occupied with domestic business more entirely than in her mistress's house. So Madame Erlingsen was well pleased that Erica was betrothed; and she could only have been better satisfied if she had been married at once.

For this marrying, however, the young people must wait. There was no house, or houseman's place, vacant for them at present. There was a prospect, however. The old houseman Peder, who had served Erlingsen's father and Erlingsen himself for fifty-eight years, could now no longer do the weekly work on the farm which was his rent for his house, field, and cow. He was blind and old. His aged wife Ulla could not leave the house; and it was the most she could do to keep the dwelling in order, with occasional help from one and another. Housemen who make this sort of contract with farmers in Norway are never turned out. They have their dwelling and field for their own life and that of their wives. What they do, when disabled, is to take in a deserving young man to do their work for the farmer, on the understanding

that he succeeds to the houseman's place on the death of the old people. Peder and Ulla had made this agreement with Erica's lover, Rolf; and it was understood that his marriage with Erica should take place whenever the old people should die.

It was impossible for Erica herself to fear that Nipen was offended, at the outset of this festival day. If he had chosen to send a wind, the guests could not have come; for no human frame can endure travelling in a wind in Nordland on a January day. Happily, the air was so calm that a flake of snow, or a lock of eider-down, would have fallen straight to the ground. At two o'clock, when the short daylight was gone, the stars were shining so brightly, that the company who came by the fiord would be sure to have an easy voyage. Almost all came by the fiord, for the only road from Erlingsen's house led to so few habitations, and was so narrow, steep, and rocky, that an arrival by that way was a rare event. The path was now, however, so smooth with frozen snow, that more than one sledge attempted and performed the descent. Erlingsen and some of his servants went out to the porch, on hearing music from the water, and stood with lighted pine-torches to receive their guests, when, approaching from behind, they heard the sound of the sleigh-bells, and found that company was arriving both by sea and land.

It was a pretty sight, such an arrival. In front there was the head of a boat driving up upon the white beach, and figure after figure leaping out and hastening to be welcomed in the porch; while in the midst of the greeting the quick and regular beat of a horse's feet was heard on the frozen ground, and the active little animal rushed into the light, shaking his mane and jingling his bells, till suddenly checked by the driver, who stood upright at the back of the sledge, while the ladies reclined, so wrapped in furs that nothing could be seen of them till they had entered the house, and issued forth from the room where they threw off their pelisses and cloaks. Glad had the visitors been, whether they came by land or water, to arrive in sight of the lighted dwelling, whose windows looked like rows of yellow stars, contrasting with the blue ones overhead; and more glad still were they to be




ERLINGSEN AND SOME OF HIS SERVANTS STOOD WITH LIGHTED PINE-TORCHES TO RECEIVE THEIR GUESTS

ushered into the great room, where all was so light, so warm, so cheerful. Warm it was to the farthest corner; and too warm near the roaring and crackling fires, for the fires were of pinewood. Rows upon rows of candles were fastened against the walls above the heads of the company: the floor was strewn with juniper twigs, and the spinning-wheels, the carding-boards, every token of household labour was removed except a loom, which remained in one corner. In another corner was a welcome sight, a platform of rough boards two feet from the floor, and on it two stools. This was a token that there was to be dancing; and indeed, Oddo, the herd-boy, old Peder's grandson, was seen to have his clarionet in his belt, as he ran in and out on the arrival of fresh parties.

Before four o'clock the whole company, consisting of about forty, had arrived. They walked about the large room, sipping their strong coffee, and helping one another to the good things on the trays which were carried round —the slices of bread and butter with anchovies, or shreds of reindeer ham or tongue, or thin slices of salt cheese. When these trays disappeared, and the young woman who had served them returned into the room, Oddo was seen to reach the platform with a hop, skip, and jump, followed by a dull-looking young man with a violin. The oldest men lighted their pipes, and sat down to talk, two or three together. Others withdrew to a smaller room, where card-tables were set out, while the younger men selected their partners, and handed them forth for the gallopade. The dance was led by the blushing Erica, whose master was her partner. It had never occurred to her that she was not to take her usual place; and she was greatly embarrassed, not the less so that she knew that her mistress was immediately behind, with Rolf for her partner. Erica might, however, have led the dance in any country in Europe. All the women in Norway dance well, being practised in it from their infancy, as an exercise for which the leisure of their long winter, and the roominess of their houses, afford scope. Every woman present danced well; but none better than Erica.

"Very well! very pretty! very good!" observed the pastor, M. Kollsen, as he sat, with his pipe in his mouth,

looking on. M. Kollsen was a very young man; but the men in Norway smoke as invariably as the women dance. "Very pretty indeed! They only want double the number to make it as pretty a dance as any in Tronyem."

"What would you have, sir?" asked old Peder, who sat smoking at his elbow. "Are there not eleven couple? Oddo told me there were eleven couple; and I think I counted so many pairs of feet as they passed."

"Let me see;—yes, you are right, Peder. There are eleven couples."

"And what would you have more, sir? In this young man's father's time——"

"Rolf's father's?"

"No, sir, Erlingsen's. Ah! I forgot that Erlingsen may not seem to you or any stranger to be young; but Ulla and I have been used to call him so, and I fear I always shall, as I shall never see the furrows in his face. It will be always smooth and young to me. My Ulla says there is nothing to be sorry for in that, and she does not object to my thinking so of her face. But, as I was saying, in the elder Erlingsen's time we thought we did well when we set up nine couples at Yule; and since then the Holbergs and Thores have each made out a new farm within ten miles, and we are accustomed to be rather proud of our eleven couples. Indeed I once knew it twelve, when they got me to stand up with little Henrica, the pretty little girl whose grave lies behind, just under the rock. But I suppose there is no question but there are finer doings at Tronyem."

"Of course, of course," said the young clergyman. "But there are many youths in Tronyem that would be glad of so pretty a partner as M. Erlingsen has, if she would not look so frightened."

"Pretty she is," said Peder. "As I remember her complexion, it looks as if it was made by the reflection of our snows in its own clearness. And when you do get a full look into her eyes, how like the summer sky they are, as deep as the havens in a midsummer noon. Did you say she looks frightened, sir?"

"Yes. When does she not? Some ghost from the

grave has scared her, I suppose, or some spirit that has no grave to lie still in, perhaps. It is a great fault in her that she has so little faith. I never met with such a case; I hardly know how to conduct it. I must begin with the people about her—abolish their superstitions—and then there may be a chance for her. Meanwhile I have but a poor account to give to the bishop [1] of the religion of the district."

"Did you say, sir, that Erica wants faith? It seems to me that I never knew any one who had so much."

"You think so, because there is no idea in this region of what faith is. A prodigious work indeed my bishop has given me to do. He himself cannot be aware what it is till I send him my report. One might suppose that Christianity had never been heard of here, by the absurd credulity one meets with in the best houses, the multitude of good and evil spirits one hears of at every turn. I will blow them all to the winds presently; I will root out every superstition in a circle of twenty miles."

"You will, sir?"

"I will. Such is my duty as a Christian pastor."

"Do you suppose you can, sir?"

"Certainly. No doubt of that. What sort of pastor must he be who cannot vindicate his own religion?"

"These beliefs, sir, were among us long before you were born; and I fancy they will last till some time after you are dead. And, what is more—I should not wonder if your bishop was to tell you the same thing, when you send him your report of us."

"I thought you had had more faith, Peder. I thought you had been a better Christian."

"However that may be," said Peder, "I have some knowledge of the people about us, having lived nearly fourscore years in the parish; and perhaps, sir, as you are young, and from a distance, you would allow me to say a word. May I?"

"Oh, certainly."

But while M. Kollsen gave this permission, he took his pipe from his mouth, and beat time with it upon his knee,

[1] A hundred years ago Nordland was included in the diocese of Tronyem.

and with his foot upon the ground, to carry off his impatience at being instructed.

"My advice would be, sir, with all respect to you," said Peder, "that you should lead the people into everything that you think true and good, and pass over quietly whatever old customs and notions you do not understand or like. I have so much belief in the religion you are to teach as to feel sure that whatever will not agree with it will die off out of its way, if let alone. But if religion is brought in to hurt the people's feelings and notions, that religion will be the thing to suffer."

"I must judge for myself about such matters, of course," said M. Kollsen. He was meditating a change of place, to escape further lecturing about his duty, when Peder saved him the trouble of leaving his comfortable seat by rising and moving away towards the fire. Peder's pipe was smoked out, and he was going for more tobacco to the place where tobacco was always to be found—in a little recess above the fireplace. He felt his way carefully, that he might not interfere with the dancers, or be jostled by them; but he had not far to go. One friend begged to be sent for anything he wanted; another, with a quicker eye, brought him tobacco; and a third led him to his seat again. All looked with wonder at M. Kollsen, surprised that he, Peder's companion at the moment, young and blessed with eyesight, could let the blind old man leave his seat for such a reason. M. Kollsen whiffed away, however, quite unconscious of what everybody was thinking.

"This waltz," said Peder, when the dancers had begun again, "does not seem to go easily. There is something amiss. I think it is in the music that the fault lies. My boy's clarionet goes well enough; no fear of Oddo's being out. Pray, sir, who plays the violin at this moment?"

"A fellow who looks as if he did not like his business. He is frowning with his red brows, as if he would frown out the lights."

"His red brows! Oh, then it is Hund. I was thinking it would be hard upon him, poor fellow, if he had to play to-night. Yet not so hard as if he had to dance. It is

weary work dancing with the heels when the heart is too heavy to move. You may have heard, sir, for every one knows it, that Hund wanted to have young Rolf's place; and, some say, Erica herself. Is she dancing, sir, if I may ask?"

"Yes, with Rolf. What sort of a man is Rolf — with regard to these superstitions, I mean? Is he as foolish as Erica—always frightened about something?"

"No, indeed. It is to be wished that Rolf was not so light as he is, so inconsiderate about these matters. Rolf has his troubles and his faults, but they are not of that kind."

"Enough," said M. Kollsen with a voice of authority. "I rejoice to hear that he is superior to the popular delusions. As to his troubles and his faults, they may be left for me to discover, all in good time."

"With all my heart, sir. They are nobody's business but his own; and, may be, Erica's. Rolf has a good heart; and I doubt not Ulla and I shall have great comfort in him. He lives with us, sir, from this night forwards. There is no fear that he will wish us in our graves, though we stand between him and his marriage."

"That must be rather a painful consideration to you."

"Not at all, sir, at present. Ulla and I were all the happier, we think to this day, for having had four such years as these young people have before them, to know one another in, and grow suitable in notions and habits, and study to please one another. By the time Rolf and Erica are what we were, one or both of us will be under ground, and Rolf will have, I am certain, the pleasant feeling of having done his duty by us. It is all as it should be, sir, and I pray that they may live to say, at our age, what Ulla and I can say of the same season of our lives."

The pastor made no answer. He had not heard the last few words; for what Peder said of being under ground had plunged him into a reverie about Peder's funeral sermon, which he should, of course, have to preach. He was pondering how he should at once do justice to Peder's virtues, and mark his own disapprobation of the coun-

tenance Peder gave to the superstitions of the region in which he lived. He must keep in view the love and respect in which the old man was held by everybody, and yet he must bear witness against the great fault above mentioned. He composed two or three paragraphs in his imagination, which he thought would do, and then committed them to memory. He was roused from this employment by a loud laugh from the man whose funeral he was meditating, and saw that Peder was enjoying life, at present, as much as the youngest—with a glass of punch in his hand, and a group of old men and women round him, recalling the jests of fifty years ago.

"How goes it, Rolf?" said his master, who, having done his duty in the dancing-room, was now making his way to the card-tables, in another apartment, to see how his guests there were entertained. Thinking that Rolf looked very absent as he stood, in the pause of the dance, in silence by Erica's side, Erlingsen clapped him on the shoulder and said, "How goes it? Make your friends merry."

Rolf bowed and smiled, and his master passed on.

"How goes it?" repeated Rolf to Erica, as he looked earnestly into her face. "Is all going on well, Erica?"

"Certainly. I suppose so. Why not?" she replied. "If you see anything wrong—anything omitted, be sure and tell me. Madame Erlingsen would be very sorry. Is there anything forgotten, Rolf?"

"I think you have forgotten what the day is, that is all. Nobody that looked at you, love, would fancy it to be your own day. You look anything but merry. Hardly a smile from you to-night. And that is a great omission."

"O Rolf, there is something so much better than merriment!"

"Yes, love, but where is it? Not in your heart to-night, Erica."

"Yes, indeed, Rolf."

"You look as dull, as sad, you and Hund, as if——"

"Hund!" repeated Erica, glancing around the room for Hund, and not seeing him till her lover reminded her that Hund was the musician. "Hund does seem dull

enough, to be sure," said she, smiling. "I hope I do not often look like that."

"I am more sorry for him than you are, I see," said Rolf, brightening when he found how entirely Hund had been absent from her thoughts. "I am more sorry for Hund than you are, and with good reason, for I know what the happiness is that he has missed, poor fellow! But yet I think you might feel a little more for him. It would show that you know how to value love."

"Indeed I am very sorry for him, but more for his disappointment about the house than any other. To-day once over, he will soon fix his love on somebody else. Perhaps we shall be dancing on his betrothment-day before the year is out."

"Then I hope his girl will look merrier than you do to-night," muttered Rolf, with a sigh. "O Erica! I wish you would trust me. I could take care of you, and make you quite happy, if you would only believe it. Ah! I know what that look means. I know you love me, and all that, but you are always tormenting yourself——"

"I think I know one who is cleverer still at tormenting himself," said Erica, with a smile. "Come, Rolf, no more tormenting of ourselves or one another! No more of that after to-day! What is to-day worth, if it is not to put an end to all doubts of one another?"

"But where is the use of that, if you still will not believe that I can keep off all trouble from you—that nothing in the universe shall touch you to your hurt, while——"

"Oh, hush! hush!" said Erica, turning pale and red at the presumption of this speech. "See, they are waiting for us. One more round before supper."

And in the whirl of the waltz she tried to forget the last words Rolf had spoken; but they rang in her ears; and before her eyes were images of Nipen overhearing this defiance—and the Water-Sprite planning vengeance in its palace under the ice—and the Mountain-Demon laughing in scorn, till the echoes shouted again—and the Wood-Demon waiting only for summer to see how he could beguile the rash lover. Erica finished her dance; but when the company and the men of the household were seated at the supper-table, and she had to help her

mistress and the young ladies to wait upon them, she trembled so that she could scarcely stand. It was so very wrong of Rolf to be always defying the spirits!

Long was the supper, and hearty was the mirth round the table. People in Norway have universally a hearty appetite—such an appetite as we English have no idea of. Whether it is owing to the sharp climate, or to the active life led by all, whatever may be the cause, such is the fact. This night, piles of fish disappeared first, and then joint after joint of reindeer venison. The fine game of the country was handed round, cut up, and little but the bones was left of a score of birds. Then there were preserved fruits, and berries eaten with thick cream—almost every dish that could be thought of made of the rich cream of the north.

Erica recovered herself as the great business went on; and while her proud lover watched her, forgetting his supper, he thought to himself that no one of the fair attendants trod so lightly as Erica, no one carved so neatly, no one handed the dishes so gracefully, or was so quick at seeing to whom the most respect and attention were owing. Perhaps this last thought was suggested by Rolf's perceiving that, either by her own hand or another's, the hottest dishes and the nicest bits were found, all supper-time, close to his elbow. Madame Erlingsen, he decided, with all her experience, did not do the duties of the table so well, and the young ladies, kind and good-tempered as they were, would never, by any experience, become so graceful as Erica.

At last appeared the final dish of the long feast, the sweet cake, with which dinner and supper in Norway usually conclude. While this was sliced and handed round, Rolf observed that Erica looked anxiously towards him. He took no notice, hoping that she would come and speak to him, and that he should thus be the gainer of a few of her sweet words. She did come, and just said—

"The cake and ale are here, Rolf. Will you carry them?"

"Oh, the treat for old Nipen. Yes, I will carry them," replied Rolf, rising from his seat.

It is the custom in the country regions of Norway to give the spirit Nipen a share at festival times. His Christmas cake is richer than that prepared for the guests, and before the feast is finished it is laid in some place out of doors, where, as might be expected, it is never to be found in the morning. Everybody knew, therefore, why Rolf rose from his seat, though some were too far off to hear him say that he would carry out the treat for old Nipen.

"Now, pray do not speak so; do not call him those names," said Erica anxiously. "It is quite as easy to speak so as not to offend him. Pray, Rolf, to please me, do speak respectfully. And promise me to play no tricks, but just set the things down, and come straight in, and do not look behind you. Promise me, Rolf."

Rolf did promise, but he was stopped by two voices calling upon him. Oddo, the herd-boy, came running to claim the office of carrying out Nipen's cake; and M. Kollsen, from his seat, declared that he could not countenance any superstitious observances, would not indeed permit any so gross as this in his presence. He requested that the company might have the benefit of the cake, and made a speech in ridicule of all spirits and fairies so very bold and contemptuous that all present who had to go home that night looked in consternation at their host. If such language as M. Kollsen's were allowed, they looked for nothing less than to have their way beset by offended spirits, so that Erlingsen might hear in the morning of some being frozen, some being lost in the fiord, and others tumbled from precipices. M. Erlingsen made haste to speak. He did not use any scruples with the young clergyman. He told him that every one present would be happy at all times to hear him speak on the matters belonging to his office. He had discharged his office in the morning in betrothing Rolf and Erica, he was now resting from his business, as a guest at that table, and he would, of course, allow that the direction of the festivity rested with the host and hostess, whose desire it was that everything should be done which was agreeable to the feelings and habits of the greater number of the guests.

It was settled in a moment that Nipen should have his cake; which so shocked and annoyed M. Kollsen that he declared he would not remain to sanction anything so impious, and requested that his boatmen might be called from their suppers, and desired to have his boat ready immediately. No entreaties would soften him: go he would.

It appeared, however, that he could not go. Not a man would row him, after what he had just said of Nipen. All were sure that a gust would blow the boat over, the minute she was out of reach of land; or that a rock would spring up in deep water, where no rock was before; or that some strong hand would grasp the boat from below, and draw it down under the waters. A shudder went round as these things were prophesied; and, of course, M. Kollsen's return home that night was out of the question, unless he would row himself. At first he declared he should do this; but he was so earnestly entreated to attempt nothing so rash, that he yielded the point, with a supercilious air which perhaps concealed more satisfaction than he chose to avow to himself. He insisted on retiring immediately, however, and was shown to his chamber at once, by Erlingsen himself, who found, on his return, that the company were the better for the pastor's absence, though unable to recover the mirth which he had put to flight. Erica had been shedding a few tears, in spite of strong efforts to restrain them. Here was a bad omen already—on the very day of her betrothment; and she saw that Hund thought so; for there was a gloomy satisfaction in his eye, as he sat silently watching all that passed.

She could not help being glad that Oddo renewed his request to be allowed to carry out Nipen's cake and ale. She eagerly put the ale-can into his hand, and the cake under his arm; and Oddo was going out, when his blind grandfather, hearing that he was to be the messenger, observed that he should be better pleased if it were somebody else; for Oddo, though a good boy, was inquisitive, and apt to get into mischief by looking too closely into everything, having never a thought of fear. Everybody knew this to be true; though Oddo himself declared that

he was as frightened as anybody sometimes. Moreover, he asked what there was to pry into, on the present occasion, in the middle of the night; and appealed to the company whether Nipen was not best pleased to be served by the youngest of a party. This was allowed; and he was permitted to go, when Peder's consent was obtained, his mistress going to the door with him, and seeing him off, putting him in mind that the dancing could not begin again till he returned to take up his clarionet.

## CHAPTER II

### ODDO'S WALK

THE place where Nipen liked to find his offerings was at the end of the barn, below the gallery which ran round the outside of the building. There, in the summer, lay a plot of green grass; and, in the winter, a sheet of pure frozen snow. Thither Oddo shuffled on, over the slippery surface of the yard, and across the paddock, along the lane made by the snow-plough between high banks of snow; and he took prodigious pains, between one slip and another, not to spill the ale. He looked more like a prowling cub than a boy, wrapped as he was in his wolf-skin coat, and his fox-skin cap doubled down over his ears.

As may be supposed from Oddo's declaring that he was sometimes frightened, he was a brave boy. A cowardly boy would not have said it. A cowardly boy would not have offered to go at all. A cowardly boy would, if he had been sent, have wished that the house-door might be left open, that he might see the cheerful yellow light from within: whereas Oddo begged his mistress to shut the door, that his grandfather might not be made to feel his rheumatism by any draught, as he sat at table. A cowardly boy would have run as fast as he could, perhaps slipping or falling, and spilling the ale; and when his errand was done, he would have fled home, without looking behind him, fancying everything he saw and heard a spirit, or a wild beast. Oddo did very differently from this. As usual, he was too busy finding out how everything happened to feel afraid, as a less inquisitive boy would.

The cake steamed up in the frosty air under his nose, so warm and spicy and rich, that Oddo began to wonder what so very superior a cake could be like. He had never

tasted any cake so rich as this; nor had any one in the house tasted such, for Nipen would be offended if his cake was not richer than anybody's else. Oddo wondered more and more how this would taste, till before he had crossed the yard he wondered no longer. He broke a piece off and ate it, and then wondered whether Nipen would mind his cake being just a little smaller than usual. After a few steps more the wonder was how far Nipen's charity would go, for the cake was now a great deal smaller; and Oddo next wondered whether anybody could stop eating such a cake when it was once tasted. He was surprised to see when he came out into the starlight, at the end of the barn, how small a piece was left. He stood listening whether Nipen was coming in a gust of wind; and when he heard no breeze stirring, he looked about for a cloud where Nipen might be. There was no cloud, as far as he could see. The moon had set; but the stars were so bright as to throw a faint shadow from Oddo's form upon the snow. There was no sign of any spirit being angry at present; but Oddo thought Nipen would certainly be angry at finding so very small a piece of cake. It might be better to let the ale stand by itself, and Nipen would perhaps suppose that Madame Erlingsen's stock of groceries had fallen short, at least that it was in some way inconvenient to make the cake on the present occasion. So putting down his can upon the snow, and holding the last fragment of the cake between his teeth, he seized a birch pole which hung down from the gallery, and by its help climbed one of the posts and got over the rails into the gallery, whence he could watch what would happen. To remain on the very spot where Nipen was expected was a little more than he was equal to; but he thought he could stand in the gallery, in the shadow of the broad eaves of the barn, and wait for a little while. He was so very curious to see Nipen, and to learn how it liked its ale!

There he stood in the shadow, hearing nothing but his own munching, though there was not much of that; for as he came near the end, he took only a little crumb at a time, to spin out the treat, for never was anything so good! Then he had nothing to do but listen; but the waterfall

was frozen up, and the mill stood as still as if it was not made to move. If the wheel should creak, it would be a sign that Nipen was passing.

Presently he heard something.

"Music!" thought he. "I never heard that it liked music, and I don't think it can know much about music, for this is not at all sweet. There again; that was a sort of screech. Oh, how stupid I am," thought he again. "So much for my head being full of Nipen. It is only Hund tuning his violin, because they have all done supper. They will be waiting for me. I wish this Nipen would make haste. It can't be very hungry, that is clear."

He grew more and more impatient as the minutes passed on, and he was aware that he was wanted in the house. Once or twice he walked slowly away, looking behind him, and then turned again, unwilling to miss this opportunity of seeing Nipen. Then he called the spirit—actually begged it to appear. His first call was almost a whisper; but he called louder and louder by degrees, till he was suddenly stopped by hearing an answer.

The call he heard was soft and sweet. There was nothing terrible in the sound itself; yet Oddo grasped the rail of the gallery with all his strength as he heard it. The strangest thing was, it was not a single cry: others followed it, all soft and sweet; but Oddo thought that Nipen must have many companions, and he had not prepared himself to see more spirits than one. As usual, however, his curiosity grew more intense from the little he had heard, and he presently called again. Again he was answered by four or five voices in succession.

"Was ever anybody so stupid!" cried the boy, now stamping with vexation. "It is the echo, after all. As if there was not always an echo here opposite the rock. It is not Nipen at all. I will just wait another minute, however."

He leaned in silence on his folded arms, and had not so waited for many seconds before he saw something moving on the snow at a little distance. It came nearer and nearer, and at last quite up to the can of ale.

"I am glad I stayed," thought Oddo. "Now I can say I have seen Nipen. It is much less terrible than I

IT CAME NEARER AND NEARER, AND AT LAST QUITE UP TO THE CAN OF ALE

expected. Grandfather told me that it sometimes came like an enormous elephant or hippopotamus, and never smaller than a large bear. But this is no bigger than—let me see—I think it is most like a fox. I should like to make it speak to me. They would think so much of me at home if I had talked with Nipen."

So he began gently—

"Is that Nipen?"

The thing moved its bushy tail, but did not answer.

"There is no cake for you to-night, Nipen. I hope the ale will do. Is the ale good, Nipen?"

Off went the dark creature without a word, as quick as it could go.

"Is it offended?" thought Oddo; "or is it really what it looks like, a fox? If it does not come back, I will go down presently and see whether it has drunk the ale. If not, I shall think it is only a fox."

He presently let himself down to the ground by the way he had come up, and eagerly laid hold of the ale can. It would not stir. It was as fast on the ground as if it was enchanted, which Oddo did not doubt was the case; and he started back with more fear than he had yet had. The cold he felt on this exposed spot soon reminded him, however, that the can was probably frozen to the snow, which it might well be, after being brought warm from the fireside. It was so. The vessel had sunk an inch into the snow, and was there fixed by the frost.

None of the ale seemed to have been drunk; and so cold was Oddo by this time, that he longed for a sup of it. He took first a sup and then a draught; and then he remembered that the rest would be entirely spoiled by the frost if it stood another hour. This would be a pity, he thought; so he finished it, saying to himself that he did not believe Nipen would come that night.

At that very moment he heard a cry so dreadful that it shot, like sudden pain, through every nerve of his body. It was not a shout of anger: it was something between a shriek and a wail—like what he fancied would be the cry of a person in the act of being murdered. That Nipen was here now, he could not doubt; and, at length, Oddo fled. He fled the faster, at first, for hearing the rustle of wings;

but the curiosity of the boy even now got the better of his terror, and he looked up at the barn where the wings were rustling. There he saw in the starlight the glitter of two enormous round eyes, shining down upon him from the ridge of the roof. But it struck him at once that he had seen those eyes before. He checked his speed, stopped, went back a little, sprang up once more into the gallery. hissed, waved his cap, and clapped his hands, till the echoes were all awake again; and, as he had hoped, the great white owl spread its wings, sprang off from the ridge, and sailed away over the fiord.

Oddo tossed up his cap, cold as the night was, so delighted was he to have scared away the bird which had, for a moment, scared him. He hushed his mirth, however, when he perceived that lights were wandering in the yard, and that there were voices approaching. He saw that the household were alarmed about him, and were coming forth to search for him. Curious to see what they would do, Oddo crouched down in the darkest corner of the gallery to watch and listen.

First came Rolf and his master, carrying torches, with which they lighted up the whole expanse of snow as they came. They looked round them without any fear, and Oddo heard Rolf say—

"If it were not for that cry, sir, I should think nothing of it. But my fear is that some beast has got him."

"Search first the place where the cake and ale ought to be," said Erlingsen. "Till I see blood, I shall hope the best."

"You will not see that," said Hund, who followed; his gloomy countenance, now distorted by fear, looking ghastly in the yellow light of the torch he carried. "You will see no blood. Nipen does not draw blood."

"Never tell me that any one that was not wounded and torn could send out such a cry as that," said Rolf. Some wild brute seized him, no doubt, at the very moment that Erica and I were standing at the door listening."

Oddo repented of his prank when he saw, in the flickering light behind the crowd of guests, who seemed to hang together live a bunch of grapes, the figures of his grandfather and Erica. The old man had come out in the cold,

for his sake; and Erica, who looked as white as the snow, had no doubt come forth because the old man wanted a guide. Oddo now wished himself out of the scrape. Sorry as he was, he could not help being amused, and keeping himself hidden a little longer, when he saw Rolf discover the round hole in the snow where the can had sunk, and heard the different opinions of the company as to what this portended. Most were convinced that his curiosity had been his destruction, as they had always prophesied. What could be clearer, by this hole, than that the ale had stood there, and been carried off with the cake; and Oddo with it, because he chose to stay and witness what is forbidden to mortals?

"I wonder where he is now," said a shivering youth, the gayest dancer of the evening.

"Oh, there is no doubt about that; any one can tell you that," replied the elderly and experienced M. Holberg. "He is chained upon a wind, poor fellow, like all Nipen's victims. He will have to be shut up in a cave all the hot summer through, when it is pleasantest to be abroad; and when the frost and snow come again, he will be driven out, with a lash of Nipen's whip, and he must go flying, wherever his wind flies, without resting, or stopping to warm himself at any fire in the country. Every winter now, when Erlingsen hears a moaning above his chimney, he may know it is poor Oddo, foolish boy!"

"Foolish boy! but one can't help pitying him," said another. "Chained astride upon the wind, and never to be warm again."

Oddo had thus far kept his laughter to himself; but now he could contain himself no longer. He laughed aloud—and then louder and louder as he heard the echoes all laughing with him. The faces below, too, were so very ridiculous—some of the people staring up in the air; and others at the rock where the echo came from; some having their mouths wide open, others their eyes starting, and all looking unlike themselves in the torch-light. His mirth was stopped by his master.

"Come down, sir," cried Erlingsen, looking up at the gallery. "Come down this moment. We shall make you remember this night, as well perhaps as Nipen could

do. Come down, and bring my can, and the ale and the cake. The more pranks you play to-night, the more you will repent it."

Most of the company thought Erlingsen very bold to talk in this way; but he was presently justified by Oddo's appearance on the balustrade. His master seized him as he touched the ground, while the others stood aloof.

"Where is my ale can?" said Erlingsen.

"Here, sir;" and Oddo held it up dangling by the handle.

"And the cake—I bade you bring down the cake with you."

"So I did, sir."

And to his master's look of inquiry, the boy answered by pointing down his throat with one finger, and laying the other hand upon his stomach. "It is all here, sir."

"And the ale in the same place?"

Oddo bowed, and Erlingsen turned away without speaking. He could not have spoken without laughing.

"Bring this gentleman home," said Erlingsen presently to Rolf; "and do not let him out of your hands. Let no one ask him any questions till he is in the house." Rolf grasped the boy's arm, and Erlingsen went forward to relieve Peder, though it was not very clear to him at the moment, whether such a grandchild was better safe or missing. The old man made no such question, but hastened back to the house, with many expressions of thanksgiving.

As the search-party crowded in among the women, and pushed all before them into the large warm room, M. Kollsen was seen standing on the stair-head, wrapped in the bear-skin coverlid.

"Is the boy there?" he inquired.

Oddo showed himself.

"How much have you seen of Nipen, hey?"

"Nobody ever had a better sight of it, sir. It was as plain as I see you now, and no farther off."

"Nonsense—it is a lie," said M. Kollsen. "Do not believe a word he says," advised the pastor, speaking to the listeners. "There is the folly of giving such an opportunity to a child of making himself important. If he had

had his share of the cake, with the rest of us at table, he would have taken it quietly, and been thankful. As it is, it will be harder work than ever to drive out these wicked superstitions. Go, get along!" he cried to Oddo; "I do not want to hear a word you have got to say."

Oddo bowed, and proceeded to the great room, where he took up his clarionet, as if it was a matter of course that the dancing was to begin again immediately. He blew upon his fingers, however, observing that they were too stiff with cold to do their duty well. And when he turned towards the fire, every one made way for him, in a very different manner from what they would have dreamed of three hours before. Oddo had his curiosity gratified as to how they would regard one who was believed to have seen something supernatural.

Erlingsen saw that something must be done on the spot to clear up the affair. If his guests went home without having heard the mysteries of the night explained, the whole country would presently be filled with wild and superstitious stories. He requested Peder to examine the boy, as Oddo stood more in awe of his grandfather than of any one else; and also because Peder was known to be so firm a believer in Nipen, that his judgment would be more readily received than that of an unbeliever. When seriously questioned, Oddo had no wish to say anything but the truth; and he admitted the whole—that he had eaten the entire cake, drunk all the ale, seen a fox and an owl, and heard the echoes, in answer to himself. As he finished his story, Hund, who was perhaps the most eager listener of all, leaped thrice upon the floor, snapping his fingers, as if in a passion of delight. He met Erlingsen's eye, full of severity, and was quiet; but his countenance still glowed with exultation.

The rest of the company were greatly shocked at these daring insults to Nipen: and none more so than Peder. The old man's features worked with emotion, as he said in a low voice that he should be very thankful if all the mischief that might follow upon this adventure might be borne by the kin of him who had provoked it. If it should fall upon those who were innocent, never surely had boy been so miserable as his poor lad would then

be. Oddo's eyes filled with tears as he heard this; and he looked up at his master and mistress, as if to ask whether they had no word of comfort to say.

"Neighbour," said Madame Erlingsen to Peder, "is there any one here who does not believe that God is over all, and that He protects the innocent?"

"Is there any one who does not feel," added Erlingsen, "that the innocent should be gay, safe as they are in the goodwill of God and man? Come, neighbours—to your dancing again! You have lost too much time already. Now, Oddo, play your best—and you, Hund."

"I hope," said Oddo, "that, if any mischief is to come, it will fall upon me. We'll see how I shall bear it."

"Mischief enough will befall you, boy, never doubt it," said his master, "as long as you trifle with people's feelings as you have done to-night. Go. Make up for it, all you can."

The dancing was spiritless, and there was little more of it. The mirth of the meeting was destroyed. The party broke up at three, instead of five or six; and it might have been earlier still, but for the unwillingness of every family present to be the first to go upon the lake, or to try the road. At last, all understood one another's feelings by their own; and the whole company departed at once in two bands, one by water and the other by land. Those who went in sleighs took care that a heavy stone was fastened by a rope to the back of each carriage, that its bobbing and dancing on the road might keep off the wolves. Glad would they have been of any contrivance by which they might as certainly distance Nipen. Rolf then took a parting kiss from Erica in the porch, pushed Oddo on before, and followed with Peder. Erica watched them quite to the door of their own house, and then came in, and busied herself in making a clearance of some of the confusion which the guests had left behind.

"Oddo could not get a word from you, Erica," observed her mistress; "not even a look in answer to his 'good-night.'"

"I could not, madam," answered Erica, tears and sobs breaking forth. "When I think of it all, I am so shocked —so ashamed!"

"How ashamed?"

"Nipen has been so favourable to us to-day, madam! not a breath of wind stirring all the morning, so that nobody was disappointed of coming! And then to serve it in this way! To rob it, and mock it, and brave it as we have done!—So ungrateful!—so very wrong!"

"We are very sorry for Oddo's trick—your master and I," said Madame Erlingsen; "but we are not in the least afraid of any further harm happening. You know we do not believe that God permits His children to be at the mercy of evil or capricious spirits. Indeed, Erica, we could not love God as we should wish to love Him, if we could not trust in Him as a just and kind protector. Go to rest now, Erica. You have done quite enough since you left your bed. Go to rest now. Rest your heart upon Him who has blessed you exceedingly this day. Whatever others do, do not you be ungrateful to Him. Good sleep to you, Erica! Sleep off your troubles, that Rolf may see nothing of them in the morning."

Erica smiled; and when Orga and Frolich saw the effect of what their mother had said, they too went to rest without trembling at every one of the noises with which a house built of wood is always resounding.

## CHAPTER III

### OLAF AND HIS NEWS

When M. Kollsen appeared the next morning, the household had so much of its usual air that no stranger would have imagined how it had been occupied the day before. The large room was fresh strewn with evergreen sprigs; the breakfast-table stood at one end, where each took breakfast, standing, immediately on coming downstairs. At the bottom of the room was a busy group. The shoemaker, who travelled this way twice a year, had appeared this morning, and was already engaged upon the skins which had been tanned on the farm, and kept in readiness for him. He was instructing Oddo in the making of the tall boots of the country; and Oddo was so eager to have a pair in which he might walk knee-deep in the snow when the frosts should be over, that he gave all his attention to the work. Peder was twisting strips of leather, thin and narrow, into whips. Rolf and Hund were silently intent upon a sort of work which the Norwegian peasant delights in—carving wood. They spoke only to answer Peder's questions about the progress of the work. Peder loves to hear about their carving, and to feel it; for he had been remarkable for his skill in the art, as long as his sight lasted.

Erlingsen was reading the newspaper, which must go away in the pastor's pocket. Madame was spinning; and her daughters sat busily plying their needles with Erica, in a corner of the apartment. The three were putting the last stitches to the piece of work which the pastor was also to carry away with him, as his fee for his services of yesterday. It was an eider-down coverlid, of which Rolf had procured the down from the islets in the fiord frequented by the eider-duck, and Erica had woven the cover, and quilted it, with the assistance of her young ladies, in an elegant pattern. The other house-

maiden was in the chambers, hanging out the bedding in an upper gallery to air, as she did on all days of fair weather.

The whole party rose when M. Kollsen entered the room, but presently resumed their employments, except Madame Erlingsen, who conducted the pastor to the breakfast-table, and helped him plentifully to reindeer ham, bread and butter, and corn-brandy — the usual breakfast. M. Kollsen carried his plate, and ate, as he went round to converse with each group. First, he talked politics a little with his host, by the fireside; in the midst of which conversation Erlingsen managed to intimate that nothing would be heard of Nipen to-day, if the subject was let alone by themselves: a hint which the clergyman was willing to take, as he supposed it meant in deference to his views. Then he complimented Madame Erlingsen on the excellence of her ham, and helped himself again; and next drew near the girls.

Erica blushed, and was thinking how she should explain that she wished his acceptance of her work, when Frolich saved her the awkwardness by saying—

"We hope you will like this coverlid, for we have made an entirely new pattern on purpose for it. Orga, you have the pattern. Do show M. Kollsen how pretty it looks on paper."

M. Kollsen did not know much about such things: but he admired as much as he could.

"That lily of the valley, see, is mamma's idea; and the barberry, answering to it, is mine. That tree in the middle is all Erica's work—entirely; but the squirrel upon it, we never should have thought of. It was papa who put that into our heads! and it is the most original thing in the whole pattern. Erica has worked it beautifully, to be sure."

"I think we have said quite enough about it," observed Erica, smiling and blushing. "I hope M. Kollsen will accept it. The down is Rolf's present."

Rolf rose, and made his bow, and said he had had pleasure in preparing his small offering.

"And I think," said Erlingsen, "it is pretty plain that my little girls have had pleasure in their part of the work.

It is my belief that they are sorry it is so nearly done."

M. Kollsen graciously accepted the gift—took up the coverlid, and weighed it in his hand, in order to admire its lightness, compared with its handsome size; and then bent over the carvers, to see what work was under their hands.

"A bell-collar, sir," said Hund, showing his piece of wood. "I am making a complete set for our cows, against they go to the mountain, come summer."

"A pulpit, sir," explained Rolf, showing his work in his turn.

"A pulpit! Really! And who is to preach in it?"

"You, sir, of course," replied Erlingsen. "Long before you came—from the time the new church was begun, we meant it should have a handsome pulpit. Six of us, within a round of twenty miles, undertook the six sides; and Rolf has great hopes of having the basement allotted to him afterwards. The best work man is to do the basement; and I think Rolf bids fair to be the one. This is good work, sir."

"Exquisite," said the pastor. "I question whether our native carvers may not be found equal to any whose works we hear so much of in Popish churches, in other countries. And there is no doubt of the superiority of their subjects. Look at these elegant twining flowers, and that fine brooding eagle! How much better to copy the beautiful works of God that are before our eyes, than to make durable pictures of the Popish idolatries and superstitions, which should all have been forgotten as soon as possible! I hope that none of the impious idolatries, which, I am ashamed to say, still linger among us, will find their way into the arts by which future generations will judge us."

The pastor stopped, on seeing that his hearers looked at one another, as if conscious. A few words, he judged, would be better than more; and he went on to Peder, passing by Oddo without a word of notice. The party had indeed glanced consciously at each other; for it so happened that the very prettiest piece Rolf had ever carved was a bowl on which he had shown the water

sprite's hand (and never was hand so delicate as the water-sprite's) beckoning the heron to come and fish when the river begins to flow.

When Erica heard M. Kollsen inquiring of Peder about his old wife, she started up from her work, and said she must run and prepare Ulla for the pastor's visit. Poor Ulla would think herself forgotten this morning, it was growing so late, and nobody had been over to see her.

Ulla, however, was far from having any such thoughts. There sat the old woman, propped up in bed, knitting as fast as fingers could move, and singing, with her soul in her song, though her voice was weak and unsteady. She was covered with an eider-down quilt, like the first lady in the land; but this luxury was a consequence of her being old and ill, and having friends who cared for her infirmities. There was no other luxury. Her window was glazed with thick flaky glass, through which nothing could be seen distinctly. The shelf, the table, the clothes' chest, were all of rough fir-wood; and the walls of the house were of logs, well stuffed with moss in all the crevices, to keep out the cold. There are no dwellings so warm in winter and cool in summer as well-built log-houses; and this house had everything essential to health and comfort: but there was nothing more, unless it was the green sprinkling of the floor, and the clean appearance of everything the room contained, from Ulla's cap to the wooden platters on the shelf.

"I thought you would come," said Ulla. "I knew you would come, and take my blessing on your betrothment, and my wishes that you may soon be seen with the golden crown.[1] I must not say that I hope to see you crowned; for we all know—and nobody so well as I—that it is I that stand between you and your crown. I often think of it, my dear——"

"Then I wish you would not, Ulla—you know that."

"I do know it, my dear; and I would not be for hastening God's appointments. Let all be in His own time. And I know, by myself, how happy you may be—you and Rolf—while Peder and I are failing and dying.

[1] Peasant brides in Norway wear, on their wedding-day, a coronet of paste-board, covered with gilt paper.

I only say that none wish for your crowning more than we. O Erica! you have a fine lot in having Rolf."

"Indeed I know it, Ulla."

"Do but look about you, dear, and see how he keeps the house. And if you were to see him give me my cup of coffee, and watch over Peder, you would consider what he is likely to be to a pretty young thing like you, when he is what he is to two worn-out old creatures like us."

Erica did not need convincing about these things; but she liked to hear them.

"Where is he now?" asked Ulla. "I always ask where everybody is, at this season; people go about staring at the snow, as if they had no eyes to lose. That is the way my husband did. Do make Rolf take care of his precious eyes, Erica. Is he abroad to-day, my dear?"

"By this time he is," replied Erica. "I left him at work at the pulpit——"

"Aye! trying his eyes with fine carving, as Peder did!"

"But," continued Erica, "there was news this morning of a lodgment of logs at the top of the foss;[1] and they were all going, except Peder, to slide them down the gully to the fiord. The gully is frozen so slippery, that the work will not take long. They will make a raft of the logs in the fiord; and either Rolf or Hund will carry them out to the islands when the tide ebbs."

"Will it be Rolf, do you think, or Hund, dear?"

"I wish it may be Hund. If it be Rolf, I shall go with him. O Ulla! I cannot lose sight of him, after what happened last night. Did you hear? I do wish Oddo would grow wiser."

Ulla shook her head, and then nodded, to intimate that they would not talk of Nipen. And she began to speak of something else.

"How did Hund conduct himself yesterday? I heard my husband's account: but you know Peder could say nothing of his looks. Did you mark his countenance, dear?"

[1] Waterfall. Pine-trunks felled in the forest are drawn over the frozen snow to the banks of a river, or to the top of a waterfall, whence they may be either slid down over the ice, or left to be carried down by the floods, at the melting of the snows in the spring.

"Indeed there was no helping it, any more than one can help watching a storm-cloud as it comes up."

"So it was dark and wrathful, was it, that ugly face of his? Well it might be, dear;—well it might be."

"The worst was—worse than all his dark looks together—O Ulla! the worst was his leap and cry of joy when he heard what Oddo had done, and that Nipen was made our enemy. He looked like an evil spirit when he fixed his eyes on me, and snapped his fingers."

Ulla shook her head mournfully, and then asked Erica to put another peat on the fire.

"I really should like to know," said Erica, in a low voice, when she resumed her seat on the bed, "I am sure you can tell me if you would, what is the real truth about Hund, what it is that weighs upon his heart."

"I will tell you," replied Ulla. "You are not one that will go blabbing it, so that Hund shall meet with taunts, and have his sore heart made sorer. I will tell you, my dear, though there is no one else but our mistress that I would tell; and she, no doubt, knows it already. Hund was born and reared a good way to the south—not far from Bergen. In midwinter, four years since, his master sent him on an errand of twenty miles, to carry some provisions to a village in the upper country. He did his errand; and, so far, all was well. The village people asked him, for charity, to carry three orphan children on his sledge some miles on the way to Bergen, and to leave them at a house he had to pass on his road, where they would be taken care of till they could be fetched from Bergen. Hund was an obliging young fellow then, and he made no objection. He took the little things, and saw that the two elder were well wrapped up from the cold. The third he took within his arms, and on his knees as he drove, clasping it warm against his breast. So those say who saw them set off; and it is confirmed by one who met the sledge on the road, and heard the children prattling to Hund, and Hund laughing merrily at their little talk. Before they had got half way, however, a pack of hungry wolves burst out upon them from a hollow to the right of the road. The brutes followed close at the back of the sledge, and——"

North Central College Library

"Oh, stop!" cried Erica, "I know that story. Is it possible that Hund is the man? No need to go on, Ulla."

But Ulla thought there was always need to finish a story that she had begun, and she proceeded.

"Closer and closer the wolves pressed, and it is thought Hund saw one about to spring at his throat. It was impossible for the horse to go faster than it did, for it went like the wind, but so did the beasts. Hund snatched up one of the children behind him and threw it over the back of the sledge, and this stopped the pack for a little. On galloped the horse, but the wolves were soon crowding round again, with the blood freezing on their muzzles. It was easier to throw the second child than the first, and Hund did it. It was harder to give up the third—the dumb infant that nestled to his breast, but Hund was in mortal terror, and a man beside himself with terror has all the cruelty of a pack of wolves. Hund flung away the infant, and just saved himself. Nobody at home questioned him, for nobody knew about the orphans, and he did not tell. But he was unsettled, and looked wild; and his talk, whenever he did speak, night or day, was of wolves, for the three days that he remained after his return. Then there was a questioning along the road about the orphan children, and Hund heard of it, and started off into the woods. By putting things together—what Hund had dropped in his agony of mind, and what had been seen and heard on the road, the whole was made out, and the country rose to find Hund. He was hunted like a bear, in the forest and on the mountain; but he had got to the coast in time, and was taken in a boat, it is thought, to Hammerfest. At any rate, he came here as from the north, and wishes to pass for a northern man."

"And does Erlingsen know all this?"

"Yes. The same person who told me told him. Erlingsen thinks he must meet with mercy, for that none need mercy so much as the weak, and Hund's act was an act of weakness."

"Weakness!" cried Erica, with disgust.

"He is a coward, my dear, and death stared him in the face."

"I have often wondered," said Erica, "where on the

face of the earth that wretch was wandering: and it is Hund! And he wanted to live in this very house," she continued, looking round the room.

"And to marry you, dear. Erlingsen would never have allowed that. But the thought has plunged the poor fellow deeper, instead of saving him, as he hoped. He now has envy and jealousy at his heart, besides the remorse which he will carry to his grave."

"And revenge," said Erica, shuddering. "I tell you he leaped for joy that Nipen was offended. Here is some one coming," she exclaimed, starting from her seat as a shadow flitted over the thick window-pane, and a hasty knock was heard at the door.

"You are a coward, if ever there was one," said Ulla, smiling. "Hund never comes here, so you need not look so frightened. What is to be done if you look so at dinner or the next time you meet him? It will be the ruin of some of us. Go—open the door, and do not keep the pastor waiting."

There was another knock before Erica could reach the door, and Frolich burst in.

"Such news!" she cried—"You never heard such news."

"I wish there never was any news," exclaimed Erica, almost pettishly.

"Good or bad?" inquired Ulla.

"Oh, bad—very bad," declared Frolich, who yet looked as if she would rather have it than none. "Here is company. Olaf, the drug merchant, is come. Father did not expect him these three weeks."

"This is not bad news, but good," said Ulla. "Who knows but he may bring me a cure?"

"We will all beg him to cure you, dear Ulla," said Frolich, stroking the old woman's white hair smooth upon her forehead. "But he tells us shocking things. There is a pirate vessel among the islands. She was seen off Soroe some time ago, but she is much nearer to us now. There was a farmhouse seen burning on Alten fiord last week, and as the family are all gone and nothing but ruins left, there is little doubt the pirates lit the torch that did it. And the cod has been carried off from

the beach in the few places where any has been caught yet."

"They have not found out our fiord yet?" inquired Ulla.

"Oh dear! I hope not. But they may, any day. And father says the coast must be raised, from Hammerfest to Tronyem, and a watch set till this wicked vessel can be taken or driven away. He was going to send a running message both ways, but here is something else to be done first."

"Another misfortune?" asked Erica faintly.

"No; they say it is a piece of very good fortune—at least for those who like bears' feet for dinner. Somebody or other has lighted upon the great bear that got away in the summer, and poked her out of her den on the fjelde. She is certainly abroad with her two last year's cubs, and their traces have been found just above, near the foss. Olaf had heard of her being roused, and Rolf and Hund have found her traces. Oddo has come running home to tell us, and father says he must get up a hunt before more snow falls and we lose the tracks, or the family may establish themselves among us and make away with our first calves."

"Does he expect to kill them all?"

"I tell you we are all to grow stout on bears' feet. For my part I like bears' feet best on the other side of Tronyem."

"You will change your mind, Miss Frolich, when you see them on the table," observed Ulla.

"That is just what father said. And he asked how I thought Erica and Stiorna would like to have a den in their neighbourhood when they got up to the mountain for the summer. Oh, it will be all right when the hunt is well over and all the bears dead. Meantime I thought they were at my heels as I crossed the yard."

"And that made you burst in as you did. Did Olaf say anything about coming to see me? Has he plenty of medicines with him?"

"Oh, certainly. That was the thing I came to say. He is laying out his medicines while he warms himself, and then he is coming over to see what he can do for your

poor head. He asked about you directly, and he is frowning over his drugs as if he meant to let them know that they must not trifle with you."

Ulla was highly pleased, and gave her directions very briskly about the arrangement of the room. If it had been the grandest apartment of a palace she could not have been more particular as to where everything should stand. When all was to her mind, she begged Erica to step over and inform Olaf that she was ready.

When Erica opened the door, she instantly drew back and shut it again.

"What now?" asked Frolich. "Are all the bears in the porch?"

"Olaf is there," replied Erica in a whisper, "talking with Hund."

"Hund wants a cure for the heartache," Frolich whispered in return, "or a charm to make some girl betroth herself to him—a thing which no girl will do but under a charm, for I don't believe Stiorna would when it came to the point, though she likes to be attended to."

When Olaf entered, and Hund walked away, Frolich ran home, and Erica stood by the window ready to receive the travelling doctor's opinion and directions, if he should vouchsafe any.

"So I am not the first to consult you to-day," said Ulla. "It is rather hard that I should not have the best chance of luck, having been so long ill."

Olaf assured her that he would hear no complaints from another till he had given her the first fruits of his wisdom in this district of his rounds. Hund was only inquiring of him where the pirate schooner was, having slid down from the height, as fast as his snow-skates would carry him, on hearing the news from Oddo. He was also eager to know whence these pirates came—what nation they were of, or whether a crew gathered from many nations. Olaf had advised Hund to go and ask the pirates themselves all that he wanted to know, for there was no one else who could satisfy him. Whereupon Hund had smiled grimly, and gone back to his work.

Erica observed that she had heard her master say that it was foolish to boast that Norway need not mind when

Denmark went to war, because it would be carried on far out of sight and hearing. So far from this, Erlingsen had said, that Denmark never went to war but pirates came to ravage the coast, from the North Cape to the Naze. Was not this the case now? Denmark had gone to war, and here were the pirates come to make her poor partner suffer.

Olaf said this explained the matter, and he feared the business of the coast would suffer till a time of peace. Meanwhile he must mind his business. When he had heard all Ulla's complaints, and ordered exactly what she wished —large doses of camphor and corn-brandy to keep off the night-fever and daily cough, he was ready to hear whatever else Erica had to ask, for Ulla had hinted that Erica wanted advice.

"I do not mind Ulla hearing my words," said Erica. "She knows my trouble."

"It is of the mind," observed Olaf solemnly, on discovering that Erica did not desire to have her pulse felt.

"Yesterday was—I was——" Erica began.

"She was betrothed yesterday," said Ulla, "to the man of her heart. Rolf is such a young man——"

"Olaf knows Rolf," observed Erica. "An unfortunate thing happened, at the end of the day, Olaf. Nipen was insulted." And she told the story of Oddo's prank, and implored the doctor to say if anything could be done to avert bad consequences.

"No doubt," replied Olaf. "Look here! this will preserve you from any particular evil that you dread." And he took from the box he carried under his arm a round piece of white paper, with a hole in the middle, through which a string was to be passed, to tie the charm round the neck. Erica shook her head. Such a charm would be of no use, as she did not know under what particular shape of misfortune Nipen's displeasure would show itself. Besides, she was certain that nothing would make Rolf wear a charm, and she disdained to use any security which he might not share. Olaf could not help her in any other way, but inquired with sympathy when the next festival would take place. Then all might be

IN THE PORCH SHE FOUND ODDO EATING SOMETHING
WHICH CAUSED HIM TO MAKE FACES

repaired by handsome treatment of Nipen. Till then he advised Erica to wear his charm, as her lover could not be the worse for her being so far safe. Erica blushed. She knew, but did not say, that harm would be done which no charm could repair if her lover saw her trying to save herself from dangers to which he remained exposed; and she did not know what their betrothment was worth if it did not give them the privilege of suffering together. So she put back the charm into its place in the box, and with a sigh rose to return to the house.

In the porch she found Oddo eating something which caused him to make faces. Though it was in the open air, there was a strong smell of camphor, and of something else less pleasant.

"What are you doing, Oddo?" asked Erica, the question which Oddo was asked every day of his life.

Oddo had observed Olaf's practice among his patients of the household, and perceived that for all complaints of body or mind he gave the two things, camphor and assafœtida, sometimes together, and sometimes separately, and always in corn-brandy. Oddo could not refrain from trying what these drugs were like, so he helped himself to some of each, and, as he could get no corn-brandy till dinner-time, he was eating the medicines without. Such was the cause of his wry faces. If he had been anything but a Norway boy he would have been the invalid of the house to-day, from the quantity of rich cake he had eaten, but Oddo seemed to share the privilege common to Norwegians, of being able to eat anything, in any quantity, without injury. His wry faces were from no indigestion, but from the savour of assafœtida unrelieved by brandy.

Wooden dwellings resound so much as to be inconvenient for those who have secrets to tell. In the porch of Peder's house Oddo had heard all that passed within. It was good for him to have done so. He became more sensible of the pain he had given, and more anxious to repair it.

"Dear Erica," said he, "I want you to do a very kind thing for me. Do get leave for me to go with Rolf after the bears. If I get one stroke at them—if I can but

wound one of them, I shall have a paw for my share, and I will lay it out for Nipen. You will, will not you?"

"It must be as Erlingsen chooses, Oddo, but I fancy you will not be allowed to go just now. The bears will think the doctor's physic-sledge is coming through the woods, and they will be shy. Do stand a little farther off. I cannot think how it is that you are not choked."

"Suppose you go for an airing," said the doctor, who now joined them. "If you must not go in the way of the bears, there is a reindeer——"

"Oh, where?" cried Oddo.

"I saw one, all alone, on the Salten heights. If you run that way, with the wind behind you, the deer will give you a good run—up Sulitelma, if you like, and you will have got rid of the camphor before you come back. And be sure you bring me some Iceland moss, to pay me for what you have been helping yourself to."

When Oddo had convinced himself that Olaf really had seen a reindeer on the heights, three miles off, he said to himself that if deer do not like camphor, they are fond of salt; and he was presently at the salt-box, and then quickly on his way to the hills with his bait. He considered his chance of training home the deer much more probable than that Erlingsen and his grandfather would allow him to hunt the bears; and he doubtless judged rightly.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROVING HERE AND ROVING THERE

The establishment was now in a great hurry and bustle for an hour, after which time it promised to be unusually quiet.

M. Kollsen began to be anxious to be on the other side of the fiord. It was rather inconvenient, as the two men were wanted to go in different directions, while their master took a third, to rouse the farmers for the bear-hunt. The hunters were all to arrive before night within a certain distance of the thickets where the bears were now believed to be. On calm nights it was no great hardship to spend the dark hours in the bivouac of the country. Each party was to shelter under a bank of snow, or in a pit dug out of it, an enormous fire blazing in the midst, and brandy and tobacco being plentifully distributed on such occasions. Early in the morning the director of the hunt was to go his rounds, and arrange the hunters in a ring enclosing the hiding-place of the bears, so that all might be prepared, and no waste made of the few hours of daylight which the season afforded. As soon as it was light enough to see distinctly among the trees, or bushes, or holes of the rocks where the bears might be couched, they were to be driven from their retreat and disposed of as quickly as possible. Such was the plan, well understood in such cases throughout the country. On the present occasion it might be expected that the peasantry would be ready at the first summons, as Olaf had told his story of the bears all along the road. Yet the more messengers and helpers the better, and Erlingsen was rather vexed to see Hund go with alacrity to unmoor the boat and offer officiously to row the pastor across the fiord. His daughters knew what he was thinking about, and, after a moment's consultation, Frolich asked whether she and the maid Stiorna, might not be the rowers.

Nobody would have objected if Hund had not. The girls could row, though they could not hunt bears, and the weather was fair enough; but Hund shook his head, and went on preparing the boat. His master spoke to him, but Hund was not remarkable for giving up his own way. He would only say that there would be plenty of time for both affairs, and that he could follow the hunt when he returned, and across the lake he went.

Erlingsen and Rolf presently departed, accompanied by Olaf, who was glad of an escort for a few miles, though nothing was further from his intention than going near the bears. The women and Peder were thus left behind.

They occupied themselves, to keep away anxious thoughts. One began some new nets for the approaching fishing season; another sat in the loom, and the girls appealed to their mother very frequently about the beauties of a new quilting pattern they were drawing. Old Peder sang to them, too, but Peder's songs were rather melancholy, and they had not the effect of cheering the party. Hour after hour they looked for Hund. His news of his voyage, and the sending him after his master, would be something to do and to think of; but Hund did not come. Stiorna at last let fall that she did not think he would come yet, for that he meant to catch some cod before his return. He had taken tackle with him for that purpose, she knew, and she should not wonder if he did not appear till the morning.

Every one was surprised, and Madame Erlingsen highly displeased. At the time when her husband would be wanting every strong arm that could be mustered, his servant chose to be out fishing, instead of obeying orders. The girls pronounced him a coward, and Peder observed that to a coward, as well as a sluggard, there was ever a lion in the path. Erica doubted whether this act of disobedience arose from cowardice, for there were dangers in the fiord for such as went out as far as the cod. She supposed Hund had heard——

She stopped short, as a sudden flash of suspicion crossed her mind. She had seen Hund inquiring of Olaf about the pirates, and his strange obstinacy about this day's boating looked much as if he meant to learn more.

THE POOR ANIMAL STRUGGLED VIOLENTLY

"Danger in the fiord!" repeated Orga; "oh, you mean the pirates. They are far enough from our fiord, I suppose. If ever they do come, I wish they would catch Hund and carry him off. I am sure we could spare them nothing they would be so welcome to."

Madame Erlingsen saw that Erica was turning red and white, and resolved to ask, on the first good opportunity, what was in her mind about Hund, for no one was more disposed to distrust and watch him than the lady herself.

The first piece of amusement that occurred was the return of Oddo, who passed the windows, followed at a short distance by a wistful-looking deer, which seemed afraid to come quite up to him, but kept its branched head outstretched towards the salt which Oddo displayed, dropping a few grains from time to time. At the sight, all crowded to the windows but Frolich, who left the room on the instant. Before the animal had passed the servants' house (a separate dwelling in the yard), she appeared in the gallery which ran round the outside of it, and showed to Oddo a cord which she held. He nodded, and threw down some salt on the snow immediately below where she stood. The reindeer stooped its head, instead of looking out for enemies above, and thus gave Frolich a good opportunity to throw her cord over its antlers. She had previously wound one end round the balustrade of the gallery, so that she had not with her single strength to sustain the animal's struggles.

The poor animal struggled violently when it found its head no longer at liberty, and, by throwing out its legs, gave Oddo an opportunity to catch and fasten it by the hind leg, so as to decide its fate completely. It could now only start from side to side, and threaten with its head when the household gathered round to congratulate Oddo and Frolich on the success of their hunting. The women durst only hastily stroke the palpitating sides of the poor beast; but Peder, who had handled many scores in his lifetime, boldly seized its head and felt its horns, and the bones whence they grew, to ascertain its age.

"Do you fancy you have made a prize of a wild deer, boy?" he asked of his grandson.

"To be sure," said Oddo.

"I thought you had had more curiosity than to take such a thing for granted, Oddo. See here! Is not this ear slit?"

"Why, yes," Oddo admitted; "but it is not a slit of this year or last. It may have belonged to the Lapps once upon a time; but it has been wild for so long that it is all the same as if it had never been in a fold. It will never be claimed."

"I am of your opinion there, boy. I wish you joy of your sport."

"You may; for I doubt whether anybody will do better to-day. Hund will not, for one, if it is he who has gone out with the boat; and I think I cannot be mistaken in the handling of his oar."

"Have you seen him? Where? What is he doing?" asked one and another.

Before Oddo could answer, Madame Erlingsen desired that he would go home with his grandfather and tell Ulla about the deer, while he warmed himself. She did not wish her daughters to hear what he might have to tell of Hund. Stiorna, too, was better out of the way. Oddo had not half told the story of the deer to his grandfather when his mistress and Erica entered.

"Did not you see M. Kollsen in the boat with Hund?" she inquired.

"No. Hund was quite alone, pulling with all his might down the fiord. The tide was with him, so that he shot along like a fish."

"How do you know it was Hund that you saw?"

"Don't I know our boat? And don't I know his pull? It is no more like Rolf's than Rolf's is like master's."

"Perhaps he was making for the best fishing-ground as fast as he could."

"We shall see that by the fish he brings home."

"True. By supper-time we shall know."

"Hund will not be home by supper-time," said Oddo decidedly.

"Why not? Come, say out what you mean."

"Well, I will tell you what I saw. I watched him rowing as fast as his arm and the tide would carry him. It was so plain that there was a plan in his head, that I

forgot the deer in watching him; and I followed on from point to point, catching a sight now and then, till I had gone a good stretch beyond Salten heights. I was just going to turn back when I took one more look, and he was then pulling in for the land."

"On the north shore or south?" asked Peder.

"The north—just at the narrow part of the fiord, where one can see into the holes of the rocks opposite."

"The fiord takes a wide sweep below there," observed Peder.

"Yes; and that was why he landed," replied Oddo. "He was then but a little way from the fishing-ground, if he had wanted fish. But he drove up the boat into a little cove, a narrow dark creek, where it will lie safe enough, I have no doubt, till he comes back—if he means to come back."

"Why, where should he go? What should he do but come back?" asked Madame Erlingsen.

"He is now gone over the ridge to the north. I saw him moor the boat, and begin to climb; and I watched his dark figure on the white snow, higher and higher, till it was a speck, and I could not make it out."

"That is the way you will lose your eyes," exclaimed Ulla. "How often have I warned you—and many others as giddy as you? When you have lost your eyes, you will think you had better have minded my advice, and not have stared at the snow after a runaway that is better there than here."

"What do you think of this story, Peder?" asked his mistress.

"I think Hund has taken the short cut over the promontory, on business of his own at the islands. He is not on any business of yours, depend upon it, madame."

"And what business can he have among the islands?"

"I could say that with more certainty if I knew exactly where the pirate vessel is."

"That is your idea, Erica," said her mistress. "I saw what your thoughts were an hour ago, before we knew all this."

"I was thinking then, madame, that if Hund was gone to join the pirates, Nipen would be very ready to give

them a wind just now. A baffling wind would be our only defence; and we cannot expect that much from Nipen to-day."

"I will do anything in the world," cried Oddo eagerly. "Send me anywhere. Do think of something that I can do."

"What must be done, Peder?" asked his mistress. "There is quite enough to fear, Erica, without a word of Nipen. Pirates on the coast, and one farmhouse seen burning already."

"I will tell you what you must let me do, madame," said Erica. "Indeed you must not oppose me. My mind is quite set upon going for the boat—immediately—this very minute. That will give us time, it will give us safety for this night. Hund might bring seven or eight men upon us over the promontory; but if they find no boat, I think they can hardly work up the windings of the fiord in their own vessel to-night; unless, indeed," she added with a sigh, "they have a most favourable wind."

"All this is true enough," said her mistress; "but how will you go? Will you swim?"

"The raft, madame."

"And there is the old skiff on Thor islet," said Oddo. "It is a rickety little thing, hardly big enough for two; but it will carry down Erica and me, if we go before the tide turns."

"But how will you get to Thor islet?" inquired Madame Erlingsen. "I wish the scheme were not such a wild one."

"A wild one must serve at such a time, madame," replied Erica. "Rolf had lashed several logs before he went. I am sure we can get over to the islet. See, madame, the fiord is as smooth as a pond."

"Let her go," said Peder. "She will never repent."

"Then come back, I charge you, if you find the least danger," said her mistress. "No one is safer at the oar than you; but if there is a ripple in the water, or a gust on the heights, or a cloud in the sky, come back. Such is my command, Erica."

"Wife," said Peder, "give her your pelisse. That

will save her seeing the girls before she goes. And she shall have my cap, and then there is not an eye along the fiord that can tell whether she is man or woman."

Ulla lent her deer-skin pelisse willingly enough; but she entreated that Oddo might be kept at home. She folded her arms about the boy with tears; but Peder decided the matter with the words—

"Let him go. It is the least he can do to make up for last night. Equip, Oddo."

Oddo equipped willingly enough. In two minutes he and his companion looked like two walking bundles of fur. Oddo carried a frail basket, containing rye-bread, salt fish, and a flask of corn-brandy; for in Norway no one goes on the shortest expedition without carrying provisions.

"Surely it must be dusk by this time," said Peder.

It was dusk; and this was well, as the pair could steal down to the shore without being perceived from the house. Madame Erlingsen gave them her blessing, saying that if the enterprise saved them from nothing worse than Hund's company this night, it would be a great good. There could be no more comfort in having Hund for an inmate; for some improper secret he certainly had. Her hope was that, finding the boat gone, he would never show himself again.

"One would think," continued the lady, when she returned from watching Erica and Oddo disappear in the dusk, "one would think Erica had never known fear. Her step is as firm, and her eye as clear, as if she had never trembled in the course of her life."

"She knows how to act to-night," said Peder; "and she is going into danger for her lover, instead of waiting at home while her lover goes into danger for her. A hundred pirates in the fiord would not make her tremble as she trembled last night. Rather a hundred pirates than Nipen angry, she would say."

"There is her weakness," observed her mistress.

"Can we speak of weakness, after what we have just seen, if I may say so, madame?"

"I think so," replied Madame Erlingsen. "I think it a weakness in those who believe that a just and tender

Providence watches over us all, to fear what any power in the universe can do to them."

"M. Kollsen does not make progress in teaching the people what you say, madame. He only gets distrusted by it."

"When M. Kollsen has had more experience he will find that this is not a matter for displeasure. He will not succeed while he is displeased at what his people think sacred. When he is an older man he will pity the innocent for what they suffer from superstition; and this pity will teach him how to speak of Providence to such as our Erica. But here are my girls coming to seek me. I must meet them, to prevent them missing Erica."

"Get them to rest early, madame."

"Certainly; and you will watch in this house, Peder, and I at home."

"Trust me for hearing the oars at a furlong off, madame."

"That is more than I can promise," said the lady; "but the owl shall not be more awake than I."

## CHAPTER V

### THE WATER-SPRITES' DOINGS

ERICA now profited by her lover's industry in the morning. He had so far advanced with the raft that, though no one would have thought of taking it in its present state to the mouth of the fiord for shipment, it would serve as a conveyance in still water for a short distance safely enough.

And still indeed the waters were. As Erica and Oddo were busily and silently employed in tying moss round their oars to muffle their sound, the ripple of the tide upon the white sand could scarcely be heard; and it appeared to the eye as if the lingering remains of the daylight brooded on the fiord, unwilling to depart. The stars had, however, been showing themselves for some time; and they might now be seen twinkling below almost as clearly and steadily as overhead. As Erica and Oddo put their little raft off from the shore, and then waited with their oars suspended, to observe whether the tide carried them towards the islet they must reach, it seemed as if some invisible hand was pushing them forth, to shiver the bright pavement of constellations as it lay. Star after star was shivered, and its bright fragments danced in their wake; and those fragments reunited and became a star again, as the waters closed over the path of the raft, and subsided into perfect stillness.

The tide favoured Erica's object. A few strokes of the oar brought the raft to the right point for landing on the islet. They stepped ashore, and towed the raft along till they came to the skiff, and then they fastened the raft with the boat-hook, which had been fixed there for the skiff. This done, Oddo ran to turn over the little boat and examine its condition, but he found he could not move it. It was frozen fast to the ground. It was scarcely possible to get a firm hold of it, it was so slippery with ice; and all pulling and pushing of the two

together was in vain, though the boat was so light that either of them could have lifted and carried it in a time of thaw.

This circumstance caused a good deal of delay; and what was worse, it obliged them to make some noise. They struck at the ice with sharp stones, but it was long before they could make any visible impression, and Erica proposed again and again that they should proceed on the raft. Oddo was unwilling. The skiff would go so incomparably faster, that it was worth spending some time upon it; and the fears he had had of its leaking were removed, now that he found what a sheet of ice it was covered with—ice which would not melt to admit a drop of water while they were in it. So he knocked and knocked away, wishing that the echoes would be quiet for once, and then laughing as he imagined the ghost stories that would spring up all round the fiord to-morrow, from the noise he was then making.

Erica worked hard too; and one advantage of their labour was that they were well warmed before they put off again. The boat's icy fastenings were all broken at last, and it was launched; but all was not yet ready. The skiff had lain in a direction east and west; and its north side had so much thicker a coating of ice than the other, that its balance was destroyed. It hung so low on one side as to promise to upset with a touch.

"We must clear off more of the ice," said Erica. "But how late it is growing!"

"No more knocking, I say," replied Oddo. "There is a quieter way of trimming the boat."

He fastened a few stones to the gunwale on the lighter side, and took in a few more for the purpose of shifting the weight if necessary, while they were on their way.

They did not leave quiet behind them when they departed. They had roused the multitude of eider ducks and other sea-fowl which thronged the islet, and which now, being roused, began their night-feeding and flying, though at an earlier hour than usual. When their discordant cries were left so far behind as to be softened by distance, the flapping of wings and swash of water, as the fowl plunged in, still made the air busy all around.

The rowers were so occupied with the management of their dangerous craft, that they had not spoken since they left the islet. The skiff would have been unmanageable by any maiden and boy in our country; but on the coast of Norway it is as natural to persons of all ages and degrees to guide a boat as to walk. Swiftly but cautiously they shot through the water, till at length Oddo uttered a most hideous croak.

"What do you mean?" asked Erica, hastily glancing round her.

Oddo laughed, and looked upwards as he croaked again. He was answered by a similar croak, and a large raven was seen flying homewards over the fiord for the night. Then the echoes all croaked, till the whole region seemed to be full of ravens.

"Are you sure you know the cove?" asked Erica, who wished to put an end to this sound, unwelcome to the superstitious. "Do not make that bird croak so; it will be quiet if you let it alone. Are you sure you can find the cove again?"

"Quite sure. I wish I was as sure that Hund would not find it again before me. Pull away."

"How much farther is it?"

"Farther than I like to think of. I doubt your arm holding out; I wish Rolf was here."

Erica did not wish the same thing. She thought that Rolf was, on the whole, safer waging war with bears than with pirates, especially if Hund was among them. She pulled her oar cheerfully, observing that there was no fatigue at present; and that when they were once afloat in the heavier boat, and had cleared the cove, there need be no hurry—unless indeed they should see something of the pirate schooner on the way; and of this she had no expectation, as the booty that might be had where the fishery was beginning was worth more than anything that could be found higher up the fiords, to say nothing of the danger of running up into the country so far as that getting away again depended upon one particular wind.

Yet Erica looked behind her after every few strokes of her oar; and once, when she saw something, her start

was felt like a start of the skiff itself. There was a fire glancing and gleaming and quivering over the water, some way down the fiord.

"Some people night-fishing," observed Oddo. "What sport they will have! I wish I was with them. How fast we go! How you can row when you choose! I can see the man that is holding the torch. Cannot you see his black figure? And the spearman—see how he stands at the bow—now going to cast his spear! I wish I was there."

"We must get farther away—into the shadow somewhere, or wait," observed Erica. "I had rather not wait, it is growing so late. We might creep along under that promontory, in the shadow, if you would be quiet. I wonder whether you can be silent in the sight of night-fishing."

"To be sure," said Oddo, disposed to be angry, and only kept from it by the thought of last night. He helped to bring the skiff into the shadow of the overhanging rocks, and only spoke once more, to whisper that the fishing-boat was drifting down with the tide, and that he thought their cove lay between them and the fishing-party.

It was so. As the skiff rounded the point of the promontory, Oddo pointed out what appeared like a mere dark chasm in the high perpendicular wall of rock that bounded the waters. This chasm still looked so narrow on approaching it, that Erica hesitated to push her skiff into it, till certain that there was no one there. Oddo, however, was so clear that she might safely do this, so noiseless was their rowing, and it was so plain that there was no footing on the rocks by which he might enter to explore, that in a sort of desperation, and seeing nothing else to be done, Erica agreed. She wished it had been summer, when either of them might have learned what they wanted by swimming. This was now out of the question; and stealthily therefore she pulled her little craft into the deepest shadow, and crept into the cove.

At a little distance from the entrance it widened, but it was a wonder to Erica that even Oddo's eyes should have seen Hund moor his boat here from the other side

of the fiord; though the fiord was not more than a gunshot over in this part. Oddo himself wondered, till he recalled how the sun was shining down into the chasm at the time. By starlight, the outline of all that the cove contained might be seen, the outline of the boat among other things. There she lay! But there was something about her which was unpleasant enough. There were three men in her.

What was to be done now? Here was the very worst danger that Erica had feared—worse than finding the boat gone—worse than meeting it in the wide fiord. What was to be done?

There was nothing for it but to do nothing—to lie perfectly still in the shadow, ready, however, to push out on the first movement of the boat to leave the cove; for, though the canoe might remain unnoticed at present, it was impossible that anybody could pass out of the cove without seeing her. In such a case there would be nothing for it but a race—a race for which Erica and Oddo held themselves prepared without any mutual explanation, for they dared not speak. The faintest whisper would have crept over the smooth water to the ears in the larger boat.

One thing was certain—that something must happen presently. It is impossible for the hardiest men to sit inactive in a boat for any length of time in a January night in Norway. In the calmest nights the cold is only to be sustained by means of the glow from strong exercise. It was certain that these three men could not have been long in their places, and that they would not sit many moments more without some change in their arrangements.

They did not seem to be talking, for Oddo, who was the best listener in the world, could not discover that a sound issued from their boat. He fancied they were drowsy, and, being aware what were the consequences of yielding to drowsiness in severe cold, the boy began to entertain high hopes of taking these three men prisoners. The whole country would ring with such a feat performed by Erica and himself.

The men were, however, too much awake to be made prisoners of at present. One was seen to drink from a

flask, and the hoarse voice of another was heard grumbling, as far as the listeners could make out, at being kept waiting. The third then rose to look about him, and Erica trembled from head to foot. He only looked upon the land, however, declared he saw nothing of those he was expecting, and began to warm himself as he stood, by repeatedly clapping his arms across his breast in the way that hackney coachmen and porters do in England. This was Hund. He could not have been known by his figure, for all persons look alike in wolf-shin pelisses, but the voice and the action were his. Oddo saw how Erica shuddered. He put his finger on his lips, but Erica needed no reminding of the necessity of quietness.

The other two men then rose, and after a consultation, the words of which could not be heard, all stepped ashore, one after another, and climbed a rocky pathway.

"Now, now!" whispered Erica. "Now we can get away!"

"Not without the boat," said Oddo. "You would not leave them the boat?"

"No—not if—but they will be back in a moment. They are only gone to hasten their companions."

"I know it," said Oddo. "Now two strokes forward!"

While she gave these two strokes, which brought the skiff to the stern of the boat, Erica saw that Oddo had taken out a knife which gleamed in the starlight. It was for cutting the thong by which the boat was fastened to a birch-pole, the other end of which was hooked on shore. This was to save his going ashore to unhook the pole. It was well for him that boat chains were not in use, owing to the scarcity of metal in that region. The clink of a chain would certainly have been heard.

Quickly and silently he entered the boat and tied the skiff to its stern, and he and Erica took their places where the men had sat one minute before. They used their own muffled oars to turn the boat round, till Oddo observed that the boat oars were muffled too. Then voices were heard again. The men were returning. Strongly did the two companions draw their strokes till a good breadth of water lay between them and the shore, and then till

they had again entered the deep shadow which shrouded the mouth of the cove. There they paused.

"In with you!" some loud voice said, as man after man was seen in outline coming down the pathway. "In with you! We have lost time enough already."

"Where is she? I can't see the boat," answered the foremost man.

"You can't miss her," said one behind, "unless the brandy has got into your eyes."

"So I should have said; but I do miss her. It is very incomprehensible to me."

Oddo shook with stifled laughter as he partly saw and partly overheard the perplexity of these men. At last one gave a deep groan, and another declared that the spirits of the fiord were against them, and there was no doubt that their boat was now lying twenty fathoms deep at the bottom of the creek, drawn down by the strong hand of an angry water-spirit. Oddo squeezed Erica's little hand as he heard this. If it had been light enough, he would have seen that even she was smiling.

One of the men mourned their having no other boat, so that they must give up their plan. Another said that if they had a dozen boats he would not set foot in one after what had happened. He should go straight back, the way he came, to their own vessel. Another said he would not go till he had looked abroad over the fiord for some chance of seeing the boat. This he persisted in, though told by the rest that it was absurd to suppose that the boat had loosed itself and gone out into the fiord in the course of the two minutes that they had been absent. He showed the fragment of the cut thong in proof of the boat not having loosed itself, and set off for a point on the heights which he said overlooked the fiord. One or two went with him, the rest returning up the narrow pathway at some speed—such speed that Erica thought they were afraid of the hindmost being caught by the same enemy that had taken their boat. Oddo observed this too, and he quickened their pace by setting up very loud the mournful cry with which he was accustomed to call out to the plovers on the mountain-side on sporting days. No sound can be more melancholy; and now, as it rang

from the rocks, it was so unsuitable to the place, and so terrible to the already frightened men, that they ran on as fast as the slipperiness of the rocks would allow, till they were all out of sight over the ridge.

"Now for it, before the other two come out above us there!" said Oddo, and in another minute they were again in the fiord, keeping as much in the shadow as they could, however, till they must strike over to the islet.

"Thank God that we came!" exclaimed Erica. "We shall never forget what we owe you, Oddo. You shall see, by the care we take of your grandfather and Ulla, that we do not forget what you have done this night. If Nipen would only forgive, for the sake of this——"

"We were just in the nick of time," observed Oddo. "It was better than if we had been earlier."

"I do not know," said Erica. "Here are their brandy-bottles, and many things besides. I had rather not have had to bring these away."

"But if we had been earlier they would not have had their fright. That is the best part of it. Depend upon it, some that have not said their prayers for long will say them to-night."

"That will be good. But I do not like carrying home these things that are not ours. If they are seen at Erlingsen's they may bring the pirates down upon us. I would leave them on the islet but that the skiff has to be left there too, and that would explain our trick."

Erica would not consent to throw the property overboard. This would be robbing those who had not actually injured her, whatever their intentions might have been. She thought that if the goods were left upon some barren, uninhabited part of the shore, the pirates would probably be the first to find them; and that, if not, the rumour of such an extraordinary fact, spread by the simple country people, would be sure to reach them. So Oddo carried on shore, at the first stretch of white beach they came to, the brandy-flasks, the bear-skins, the tobacco-pouch, the muskets and powder-horns, and the tinder-box. He scattered these about, just above high-water mark,

laughing to think how report would tell of the sprites' care in placing all these articles out of reach of injury from the water.

Oddo did not want for light while doing this. When he returned, he found Erica gazing up over the towering precipices at the Northern Lights, which had now unfurled their broad yellow blaze. She was glad that they had not appeared sooner to spoil the adventure of the night, but she was thankful to have the way home thus illumined now that the business was done. She answered with so much alacrity to Oddo's question whether she was not very weary, that he ventured to say two things which had before been upon his tongue without his having the courage to utter them.

"You will not be so afraid of Nipen any more," observed he, glancing at her face, of which he could see every feature by the quivering light. "You see how well everything has turned out."

"Oh, hush! It is too soon yet to speak so. It is never right to speak so. There is no knowing till next Christmas, nor even then, that Nipen forgives; and the first twenty-four hours are not over yet. Pray do not speak any more, Oddo."

"Well, not about that. But what was it exactly that you thought Hund would do with this boat and those people? Did you think," he continued, after a short pause, "that they would come up to Erlingsen's to rob the place?"

"Not for the object of robbing the place, because there is very little that is worth their taking; far less than at the fishing-grounds. Not but they might have robbed us, if they took a fancy to anything we have. No; I thought, and I still think, that they would have carried off Rolf, led on by Hund——"

"Oh, oh! carried off Rolf! So here is the secret of your wonderful courage to-night, you who durst not look round at your own shadow last night! This is the secret of your not being tired, you who are out of breath with rowing a mile sometimes!"

"That is in summer," pleaded Erica. "However, you have my secret, as you say, a thing which is no secret at

home. We all think that Hund bears such a grudge against Rolf, for having got the houseman's place——"

"And for nothing else?"

"That," continued Erica, "he would be glad to—to——"

"To get rid of Rolf, and be a houseman, and get betrothed instead of him. Well; Hund is baulked for this time. Rolf must look to himself after to-day."

Erica sighed deeply. She did not believe that Rolf would attend to his own safety; and the future looked very dark, all shrouded by her fears.

By the time the skiff was deposited where it had been found, both the rowers were so weary that they gave up the idea of taking the raft in tow, as for full security they ought to do. They doubted whether they could get home, if they had more weight to draw than their own boat. It was well that they left this encumbrance behind, for there was quite peril and difficulty enough without it; and Erica's strength and spirits failed the more, the farther the enemy was left behind.

A breath of wind seemed to bring a sudden darkening of the friendly lights which had blazed up higher and brighter, from their first appearance till now. Both rowers looked down the fiord, and uttered an exclamation at the same moment.

"See the fog!" cried Oddo, putting fresh strength into his oar.

"O Nipen! Nipen!" mournfully exclaimed Erica. "Here it is, Oddo, the west wind!"

The west wind is, in winter, the great foe of the fishermen of the fiords; it brings in the fog from the sea, and the fogs of the Arctic Circle are no trifling enemy. If Nipen really had the charge of the winds, he could not more emphatically show his displeasure towards any unhappy boatman than by overtaking him with the west wind and fog.

"The wind must have just changed," said Oddo, pulling exhausted strokes, as the fog marched towards them over the water, like a solid and immeasurably lofty wall. "The wind must have gone right round in a minute."

"To be sure, since you said what you did of Nipen," replied Erica bitterly.

Oddo made no answer; but he did what he could. Erica had to tell him not to wear himself out too quickly, as there was no saying now how long they should be on the water.

How long they had been on the water, how far they had deviated from their right course, they could not at all tell, when, at last, more by accident than skill, they touched the shore near home, and heard friendly voices, and saw the light of torches through the thick air. The fog had wrapped them round so that they could not even see the water, or each other. They had rowed mechanically, sometimes touching the rock, sometimes grazing upon the sand, but never knowing where they were till the ringing of a bell, which they recognised as the farm bell, roused hope in their hearts, and strengthened them to throw off the fatal drowsiness caused by cold and fatigue. They made towards the bell; and then heard Peder's shouts, and next saw the dull light of two torches which looked as if they could not burn in the fog. The old man lent a strong hand to pull up the boat upon the beach, and to lift out the benumbed rowers; and they were presently revived by having their limbs chafed, and by a strong dose of the universal medicine—corn-brandy and camphor—which, in Norway, neither man nor woman, young nor old, sick nor well, thinks of refusing upon occasion.

When Erica was in bed, warm beneath an eider-down coverlid, her mistress bent over her and whispered—

"You saw and heard Hund himself?"

"Hund himself, madame."

"What shall we do if he comes back before my husband is home from the bear-hunt?"

"If he comes, it will be in fear and penitence, thinking that all the powers are against him. But oh, madame, let him never know how it really was!"

"He must not know. Leave that to me, and go to sleep now, Erica. You ought to rest well; for there is no saying what you and Oddo have saved us from. I could not have asked such a service. My husband and I must

see how we can reward it." And her kind and grateful mistress kissed Erica's cheek, though Erica tried to explain that she was thinking most of some one else, when she undertook this expedition.

"Then let him thank you in his own way," replied Madame Erlingsen. "Meantime, why should not I thank you in mine?"

Stiorna here opened her eyes for an instant. When she next did so, her mistress was gone; and she told in the morning what an odd dream she had had, of her mistress being in her room, and kissing Erica. It was so distinct a dream that, if the thing had not been so ridiculous, she could almost have declared that she had seen it.

## CHAPTER VI

### SPRING

GREAT was Stiorna's consternation at Hund's non-appearance the next day, seeing as she did with her own eyes that the boat was safe in its proper place. She had provided salt for his cod, and a welcome for himself; and she watched in vain for either. She saw, too, that no one wished him back. He was rarely spoken of, and then it was with dislike or fear; and when she wept over the idea of his being drowned, or carried off by hostile spirits, the only comfort offered her was that she need not fear his being dead, or that he could not come back if he chose. She was indeed obliged to suppose, at last, that it was his choice to keep away; for amidst the flying rumours that amused the inhabitants of the district for the rest of the winter—rumours of the movements of the pirate vessel, and of the pranks of the spirits of the region—there were some such clear notices of the appearance of Hund, so many eyes had seen him in one place or another, by land and water, by day and night, that Stiorna could not doubt of his being alive, and free to come home or stay away as he pleased. She could not conceal from herself that he had probably joined the pirates; and heartily as these pirates were feared throughout the Nordland coasts, they were not more heartily hated by any than by the jealous Stiorna.

Her salt was wanted as much as if Hund had brought home a boatful of cod; and she might have given her welcome to the hunting-party. Erlingsen and Rolf came home sooner than might reasonably have been expected, and well laden with bears' flesh. The whole family of bears had been found and shot. The flesh of the cubs had been divided among the hunters; and Erlingsen was complimented with the feet of the old bear, as it was he who had roused the neighbours and led the hunt. Busy was every

farmhouse (and none so busy as Erlingsen's) in salting some of the meat, freezing some, and cooking a part for a feast on the occasion.

Erlingsen kept a keen and constant look-out upon the fiord, in the midst of all the occupations and gaieties of the rest of the winter. His wife's account of the adventures of the day of his absence made him anxious; and he never went a mile out of sight of home, so vivid in his imagination was the vision of his house burning, and his family at the mercy of pirates. Nothing happened, however, to confirm his fears. The enemy were never heard of in the fiord; and the codfishers who came up, before the softening of the snow, to sell some of their produce in the interior of the country, gave such accounts as seemed to show that the fishing-grounds were the object of the foreign thieves—for foreign they were declared to be—some said Russian, and others a mixture from hostile nations. This last information gave more impulse to the love of country, for which the Norwegians are remarkable, than all that had been reported from the seat of war. The Nordlanders always drank success to their country's arms, in the first glass of corn-brandy at dinner. They paid their taxes cheerfully, and any newspaper that the clergyman put in circulation was read till it fell to pieces; but the neighbourhood of foreign pirates proved a more powerful stimulant still. The standing toast, *Gamil Norgé* (Old Norway), was drunk with such enthusiasm that the little children shouted and defied the enemy; and the baby in its mother's lap clapped its hands when every voice joined in the national song, *For Norgé*. Hitherto the war had gone forward upon the soil of another kingdom: it seemed now as if a sprinkling of it—a little of its excitement and danger—was brought to their own doors; and vehement was the spirit that it roused, though some thefts of cod, brandy, and a little money were all that had really happened yet.

The interval of security gave Rolf a good opportunity to ridicule and complain of Erica's fears. He laughed at the danger of an attack from Hund and his comrades, as that danger was averted. He laughed at the west wind and fog sent by Nipen's wrath, as Erica had reached home

in spite of it. He contended that, so far from Nipen being offended, there was either no Nipen, or it was not angry, or it was powerless, for everything had gone well; and he always ended with pointing to the deer—a good thing led to the very door—and to the result of the bear-hunt, a great event always in a Nordlander's life, and, in this instance, one of most fortunate issue. There was no saying how many of the young of the farmyard would live and flourish this summer on account of the timely destruction of this family of bears. So Rolf worked away with a cheerful heart as the days grew longer—now mending the boat, now fishing, now ploughing, and then rolling logs into the melting streams, to be carried down into the river, or into the fiord when the rush of waters should come from the heights of Sulitelma.

Hard as Rolf worked, he did not toil like Oddo. Between them they had to supply Hund's place—to do his work. Nobody desired to see Hund back again; and Erlingsen would willingly have taken another in his stead to make his return impossible, but there was no one to be had. It was useless to inquire till the fishing season should be over; and when that was over, the hay and harvest seasons would follow so quickly that it was scarcely likely that any youth would offer himself till the first frosts set in. It was Oddo's desire that the place should remain vacant till he could show that he, young as he was, was worth as much as Hund. If any one was hired, he wished that it might be a herd-boy, under him, and strenuously did he toil this spring to show that he was now beyond a mere herd-boy's place. It was he who first fattened and then killed and skinned the reindeer—a more than ordinary feat, as it was full two months past the regular season. It was he who watched the making of the first eider-duck's nest, and brought home the first down. All the month of April he never failed in the double work of the farmyard and islet. He tended the cattle in the morning, and turned out the goats, when the first patches of green appeared from beneath the snow; and then he was off to the islet, or to some one of the breeding stations among the rocks, punctually stripping the nests of the down, as the poor ducks renewed the

supply from their breasts, and as carefully staying his hand when he saw, by the yellow tinge of the down, that the duck had no more to give, and the drake had now supplied what was necessary for hatching the eggs. Then he watched for the eggs, and never had Madame Erlingsen had such a quantity brought home, though Oddo assured her that he had left enough in the nests for every duck to have her brood. Then he was ready to bring home the goats again long before sunset, for by this time the sun set late, and to take his turn at mending any fence that might have been injured by the spring floods, and then he never forgot to wash and dress himself, and go in for his grandmother's blessing; and after all he was not too tired to sit up as late as if he were a man—even till past nine sometimes—spending the last hour of the evening in working at the bell-collars which Hund had left half-done, and which must be finished before the cattle went to the mountain; or, if the young ladies were disposed to dance, he was never too tired to play the clarionet, though it now and then happened that the tune went rather oddly; and when Orga and Frolich looked at him to see what he was about, his eyes were shut, and his fingers looked as if they were moving of their own accord. If this happened, the young ladies would finish their waltz at once, and thank him, and his mistress would wish him good-night; and when he was gone, his master would tell old Peder that that grandson of his was a promising lad, and very diligent; and Peder would make a low bow, and say it was greatly owing to Rolf's good example; and then Erica would blush, and be kinder than ever to Oddo the next day.

So came on and passed away the spring of this year at Erlingsen's farm. It soon passed, for spring in Nordland lasts only a month. In that short time had the snow first become soft, and then dingy, and then vanished, except on the heights and in places where it had drifted. The streams had broken their long pause of silence, and now leaped and rushed along, till every rock overhanging both sides of the fiord was musical with falling waters, and glittering with silver threads—for the cataracts looked no more than this in so vast a scene. Every mill was going, after the long idleness of winter; and about the

bridges which spanned the falls were little groups of the peasants gathered, mending such as had burst with the floods, or strengthening such as did not seem secure enough for the passage of the herds to the mountain.

Busy as the maidens were with the cows that were calving, and with the care of the young kids, they found leisure to pry into the promise of the spring. In certain warm nooks, where the sunshine was reflected from the surrounding rocks, they daily watched for what else might appear, when once the grass, of brilliant green, had shown itself from beneath the snow. There they found the strawberry and the wild raspberry promising to carpet the ground with their white blossoms, while in one corner the lily of the valley began to push up its pairs of leaves, and from the crevices of the rock the barberry and the dwarf birch grew, every twig showing swelling buds, or an early sprout.

While these cheerful pursuits went on out of doors during the one busy month of spring, a slight shade of sadness was thrown over the household within by the decline of old Ulla. It was hardly sadness, it was little more than gravity; for Ulla herself was glad to go. Peder knew that he should soon follow, and every one else was reconciled to one who had suffered so long going to her rest.

"The winter and I are going together, my dear," said she one day, when Erica placed on her pillow a green shoot of birch which she had taken from out of the very mouth of a goat. "The hoary winter and hoary I have lived out our time, and we are departing together. I shall make way for you young people, and give you your turn, as he is giving way to spring; and let nobody pretend to be sorry for it. Who pretends to be sorry when winter is gone?"

"But winter will come again so soon and so certainly, Ulla," said Erica mournfully, "and when it is come again, we shall still miss you."

"Well, my dear, I will say nothing against that. It is good for the living to miss the dead, as long as they do not wish them back. As for me, Erica, I feel as if I could not but miss you, go where I may."

"Oh, do not say that, Ulla."

"Why not say it if I feel it? Who could be displeased with me for grasping still at the hand that has smoothed my bed so long, when I am going to some place that will be very good, no doubt, but where everything must be strange at first? He who gave you to me to be my nurse will not think the worse of me for missing you, wherever I may be."

"There will be little Henrica," observed Erica.

"Ah, yes! there is nothing I think of more than that. That dear child died on my shoulder. Fain would her mother have had her in her arms at the last, but she was in such extremity that to move her would have been to end all at once; and so she died away with her head on my shoulder. I thought then it was a sign that I should be the first to meet her again. But I shall take care and not stand in the way of her mother's rights."

Here Ulla grew so earnest in imagining her meeting with Henrica, still fancying her the dependent little creature she had been on earth, that she was impatient to be gone. Erica's idea was that this child might now have become so wise and so mighty in the wisdom of a better world as to be so such plaything as Ulla supposed; but she said nothing to spoil the old woman's pleasure.

When Peder came in to sit beside his old companion's bed and sing her to sleep, she told him that she hoped to be by when he opened his now dark eyes upon the sweet light of a heavenly day; and, if she might, she would meantime make up his dreams for him, and make him believe that he saw the most glorious sights of old Norway —more glorious than are to be seen in any other part of this lower world. There should be no end to the gleaming lakes, and dim forests, and bright green valleys, and silvery waterfalls that he should see in his dreams, if she might have the making of them. There was no end to the delightful things Ulla looked forward to, and the kind things she hoped to be able to do for those she left behind, when once she should have quitted her present helpless state; and she thought so much of these things that when M. Kollsen arrived, he found that instead of her needing to

be reconciled to death, she was impatient to be gone. The first thing he heard her say, when all was so dim before her dying eyes, and so confused to her failing ears, that she did not know the pastor had arrived, was that she was less uneasy now about Nipen's displeasure against the young people. Perhaps she might be able to explain and prevent mischief; and if not, the young people's marriage would soon be taking place now, and then they might show such attention to Nipen as would make the spirit forgive and forget.

"Hush, now, dear Ulla," said Erica. "Here is the pastor."

"Do not say 'hush!'" said M. Kollsen sternly. "Whatever is said of this kind I ought to hear, that I may meet the delusion. I must have conversation with this poor woman, to prevent her very last breath being poisoned with superstition. You are a member of the Lutheran Church, Ulla?"

With humble pleasure Ulla told of the satisfaction which the Bishop of Tronyem, of seventy years ago, had expressed at her confirmation. It was this which obtained her a good place, and Peder's regard, and all the good that had happened in her long life since. Yes, she was indeed a member of the Lutheran Church, she thanked God.

"And in what part of the Scriptures of our Church do you find mention of—of—(I hate the very names of these pretended spirits). Where in the Scriptures are you bidden or permitted to believe in spirits and demons of the wood and the mountain?"

Ulla declared that her learning in the Scriptures was but small. She knew only what she had been taught, and a little that she had picked up, but she remembered that the former Bishop of Tronyem himself had hung up an axe in the forest on Midsummer eve for the wood-demon's use, if it pleased.

Peder observed that we all believe so many things that are not found mentioned in the Scripture that perhaps it would be wisest and kindest, by a dying bed, where moments are precious, to speak of those high things which the Scriptures discourse of, and which all Christians

believe. These were the subjects for Ulla now, the others might be reasoned of when she was in her grave.

The pastor was not quite satisfied with this way of attending the dying, but there was something in the aged man's voice and manner quite irresistible as he sat calmly awaiting the departure of the last companion of his own generation. M. Kollsen took out his Bible and read what Ulla gladly heard, till her husband knew by the slackened clasp of her hand that she heard no longer. She had become insensible, and before sunset had departed.

Rolf had continued his kind offices to the old couple with the utmost respect and propriety, to the end refusing to go out of call during the last days of Ulla's decline; but he had observed with some anxiety that there was certainly a shoal of herrings in the fiord, and that it was high time he was making use of the sunny days for his fishing. In order to go about this duty without any delay, when again at liberty, he had brought the skiff up to the beach for repair, and had it nearly ready for use by the day of the funeral. The family boat was too large for his occasions, now that Hund was not here to take an oar, and he expected to do great things alone in the little manageable skiff.

When he had assisted Peder to lay Ulla's head in the grave, and guided him back to the house, Rolf drew Erica's arm within his own and led her away as if for a walk. No one interfered with them, for the family knew that their hearts must be very full, and that they must have much to say to each other now that the event had happened which was to cause their marriage very soon. They would now wait no longer than to pay proper respect to Ulla's memory, and to improve the house and its furniture a little so as to make it fit for the bride.

Rolf would have led Erica to the beach, but she begged to go first to see the grave again while they knew that no one was there. The grave was dug close by the little mound beneath which Henrica lay. Henrica's was railed round, with a paling which had been fresh painted—a task which Erlingsen performed with his own hands every spring. The forget-me-not, which the Nordlanders plant upon the graves of those they love, overran the hillock,

and the white blossoms of the wild strawberry peeped out from under the thick grass, so that this grave looked a perfect contrast to that of Ulla newly made and bare. The lovers looked at this last with dissatisfaction.

"It shall be completely railed in before to-morrow night," said Rolf.

"But cannot we dress it a little now? I could transplant some flower-roots presently, and some forget-me-not from Henrica's hillock, if we had sods for the rest. Never mind spoiling any other nook. The grass will soon grow again."

Rolf's spade was busy presently, and Erica planted and watered till the new grave, if it did not compare with the child's, showed tokens of care and promise of beauty.

"Now," said Rolf, when they had done, and put away their tools, and sat down on the pine log from which the pales were to be made, so that their lengthening shadows fell across the new grave—"Now, Erica, you know what she who lies there would like us to be settling. She herself said her burial-day would soon be over, and then would come our wedding-day."

"When everything is ready," replied Erica, "we will fix; but not now. There is much to be done—there are many uncertainties."

"Uncertainties? What uncertainties? I know of none—except indeed as to——"

Rolf stopped to peel off and pull to pieces some of the bark of the pine-trunk on which he was sitting. Erica looked wistfully at him; he saw it, and went on.

"It is often an uncertainty to me, Erica, after all that has happened, whether you mean to marry me at all. There are so many doubts, and so many considerations, and so many fears! I often think we shall never be any nearer than we are."

"That is your sort of doubt and fear," said Erica, smiling. "Who is there that entertains worse?"

"I do not want any rallying or joking, Erica. I am quite serious."

"Seriously then—are we not nearer than we were a year

ago? We are betrothed, and I have shown you that I do believe we are to be married, if——"

"Ay, there. 'If' again."

"If it shall please the Powers above us not to separate us, by death or otherwise."

"Death! at our age! And separation! when we have lived on the same farm for years! What have we to do with death and separation?"

Erica pointed to the child's grave in rebuke of his rash words. She then quietly observed that they had enemies —one deadly enemy not very far off, if nothing were to be said of any but human foes. Rolf declared that he had rather have Hund for a declared enemy than for a companion. Erica understood this very well, but she could not forget that Hund wanted to be houseman in Rolf's stead, and that he desired to prevent their marriage.

"That is the very reason," said Rolf, "why we should marry as soon as we can. Why not fix the day, and engage the pastor while he is here?"

"Because it would hurt Peder's feelings. There will be no difficulty in sending for the pastor when everything is ready. But now, Rolf, that all may go well, do promise not to run into needless danger."

"According to you," said Rolf, smiling, "one can never get out of danger. Where is the use of taking care, if all the powers of earth and air are against us? You think me as helpless, under Nipen's breath, as the poor infant that put out into the fiord the other day in a tub."

"I am not speaking of Nipen now—(not because I do not think of it)—I am speaking of Hund. Do promise me not to go more than four miles down the fiord. After that, there is a long stretch of precipices, without a single dwelling. There is not a boat that could put off, there is not an eye or an ear that could bear witness what had become of you if you and Hund should meet there."

"If Hund and I should meet there, I would bring him home to settle what should become of him."

"And all the pirates? You would bring them all in your right hand and row home with your left! For shame,

Rolf, to be such a boaster! Promise me not to go beyond the four miles."

"Indeed I can only promise to go where the shoal is. Four miles! Suppose you say four furlongs, love."

"I will engage to catch herrings within four furlongs."

"Pray take me with you, and then I will carry you four times four miles down, and show you what a shoal is. Really, love, I should like to prove to you how safe the fiord is to one who knows every nook and hiding-place from the entrance up. If fighting would not do, I could always hide."

"And would not Hund know where to look for you?"

"Not he. He was not brought up on the fiord to know its ways, and its holes and corners; and I told him neither that nor anything else that I could keep from him, for I always mistrusted Hund. Now, I will tell you, love. I will promise you something, because I do not wish to hurt you, as you sometimes hurt me with disregarding what I say —with being afraid, in spite of all I can do to make you easy. I will promise you not to go farther down, while alone, than Vogel islet, unless it is quite certain that Hund and the pirates are far enough off in another direction. I partly think as you do, and as Erlingsen does, that they meant to come for me the night you carried off their boat; so I will be on the watch, and go no farther than where they cannot hurt me."

"Then why say Vogel islet? It is out of all reasonable distance."

"Not to those who know the fiord as I do. I have my reasons, Erica, for fixing that distance and no other; and that far I intend to go, whether my friends think me able to take care of myself or not."

"At least," pleaded Erica, "let me go with you."

"Not for the world, my love." And Erica saw, by his look of horror at the idea of her going, that he felt anything but secure from the pirates. He took her hand, and kissed it again and again, as he said that there was plenty for that little hand to do at home, instead of pulling the oar in the hot sun. "I shall think of you all while

I am fishing," he went on. "I shall fancy you making ready for the seater.[1] As you go towards Sulitelma any day now, you may hear the voices of a thousand waterfalls, calling upon the herdmen and maidens to come to the fresh pastures. How happy we shall be, Erica, when we once get to the seater!"

Erica sighed, and pressed her lover's hand as he held hers.

"While I am fishing," he went on, "I shall fancy our young mistresses, and Stiorna and you, washing all your bowls in juniper-water, ready for your dairy. I know how the young ladies will contrive that all of my carving shall come under you hand. And I shall be back with my fish before you are gone, that I may walk beside your cart. I know just how far you will ride. When we get the first sight of the grass waving, as the wind sweeps over it on the mountain side, you will spring from the cart and walk with me all the rest of the way."

"All this would be well," said Erica, "if it were not for——"

"For what, love? For Nipen again? If you will not mind what I say about your silly fears, you shall hear from the pastor how wicked they are. I see him yonder in the garden. I will call him——"

"No, no! I know all he has to say," declared Erica.

But Rolf carried the case before M. Kollsen; and M. Kollsen, glad of every opportunity of discoursing on this subject, came and took Rolf's seat, and said all he could think of in contempt of the spirits of the region, till Erica's blood ran cold to hear him. It was not kind of Rolf to expose her to this; but Rolf had no fears himself, and was not aware how much she suffered under what the clergyman said. The lover stood by watching, and was

[1] Each Norway farm which is situated within a certain distance of the mountains has a mountain pasture, to which the herds and flocks are driven in early summer, and where they feed till the first frosts come on. The herdmen and dairywomen live on the mountain beside their cattle, during this season, and enjoy the mode of life extremely. The mountain pasture belonging to a farm is called its seater. The procession of herds and flocks, and herdmen and dairywomen with their utensils, all winding up the mountain—"going to the seater," is a pretty sight on an early summer's day.

so charmed with her gentle and submissive countenance and manner, while she could not own herself convinced, that he almost admired her superstition, and forgave her doubts of his being able to take care of himself while his deadly enemy on earth might possibly be assisted by the offended powers of the air.

## CHAPTER VII

### VOGEL ISLET

Who was ever happier than Rolf, when abroad in his skiff, on one of the most glorious days of the year! He found his angling tolerably successful near home; but the farther he went the more the herrings abounded, and he therefore dropped down the fiord with the tide, fishing as he receded, till all home objects had disappeared. First, the farmhouse, with its surrounding buildings, its green paddock, and shining white beach, was hidden behind the projecting rocks. Then Thor islet appeared to join with the nearest shore, from which its bushes of stunted birch seemed to spring. Then, as the skiff dropped lower and lower down, the interior mountains appeared to rise above the rocks which closed in the head of the fiord, and the snowy peak of Sulitelma stood up clear amidst the pale blue sky; the glaciers on its sides catching the sunlight on different points, and glittering so that the eye could scarcely endure to rest upon the mountain. When he came to the narrow part of the fiord, near the creek which had been the scene of Erica's exploit, Rolf laid aside his rod, with the bright hook that herrings so much admire, to guide his canoe through the currents caused by the approach of the rocks and contraction of the passage; and he then wished he had brought Erica with him, so lovely was the scene. Every crevice of the rocks, even where there seemed to be no soil, was tufted with bushes, every twig of which was bursting into the greenest leaf, while here and there a clump of dark pines overhung some busy cataract, which, itself overshadowed, sent forth its little clouds of spray, dancing and glittering in the sunlight. A pair of fishing eagles were perched on a high ledge of rock, screaming to the echoes, so that the dash of the currents was lost in the din. Rolf did wish that Erica was here when he thought how the colour would have

mounted into her cheek, and how her eye would have sparkled at such a scene.

Lower down it was scarcely less beautiful. The waters spread out again, to a double width. The rocks were, or appeared to be, lower; and now and then, in some space between rock and rock, a strip of brilliant green meadow lay open to the sunshine; and there were large flocks of fieldfares, flying round and round to exercise the newly-fledged young. There were a few habitations scattered along the margin of the fiord; and two or three boats might be seen far off, with diminutive figures of men drawing their nets.

"I am glad I brought my net too," thought Rolf. "My rod has done good duty; but if I am coming upon a shoal, I will cast my net, and be home laden with fish before they think of looking for me."

Happy would it have been if Rolf had cast his net where others were content to fish, and had given up all ideas of going farther than was necessary; but his boat was still dropping down towards the islet which he had fixed in his own mind as the limit of his trip, and the long solitary reach of the fiord which now lay between him and it was tempting both to the eye and the mind. It is difficult to turn back from the first summer-day trip, in countries where summer is less beautiful than in Nordland; and on went Rolf, beyond the bounds of prudence, as many have done before him. He soon found himself in a still and somewhat dreary region, where there was no motion but of the sea-birds which were leading their broods down the shores of the fiords, and of the air which appeared to quiver before the eye, from the evaporation caused by the heat of the sun. More slowly went the canoe here, as if to suit the quietness of the scene, and leisurely and softly did Rolf cast his net; and then steadily did he draw it in, so rich in fish, that when they lay in the bottom of the boat, they at once sank it deeper in the water, and checked its speed by their weight.

Rolf then rested awhile, and looked ahead for Vogel islet, thinking that he could not now be very far from it. There it lay looming in the heated atmosphere, spreading as if in the air, just above the surface of the water, to

which it appeared joined in the middle by a dark stem, as if it grew like a huge sea-flower. There is no end to the strange appearances presented in northern climates by an atmosphere so different from our own. Rolf gazed and gazed, as the island grew more like itself on his approach; and he was so occupied with it as not to look about him as he ought to have done, at such a distance from home. He was roused at length by a shout, and looked towards the point from which it came; and there, in a little harbour of the fiord, a recess which now actually lay behind him—between him and home—lay a vessel; and that vessel he knew, by a second glance, was the pirate-schooner.

Of the schooner itself he had no fear, for there was so little wind that it could not have come out in time to annoy him; but there was the schooner's boat, with five men in it—four rowing and one steering—already in full pursuit of him. He knew, by the general air and native dress of the man at the helm, that it was Hund; and he fancied he heard Hund's malicious voice in the shout which came rushing over the water from their boat to his. How fast they seemed to be coming! How the spray from their oars glittered in the sun; and how their wake lengthened with every stroke! No spectator from the shore (if there had been any) could have doubted that the boat was in pursuit of the skiff, and would snap it up presently. Rolf saw that he had five determined foes, gaining upon him every instant; and yet he was not alarmed. He had had his reasons for thinking himself safe near Vogel islet; and, calculating for a moment the time of the tide, he was quite at his ease. As he took his oars he smiled at the hot haste of his pursuers, and at the thought of the amazement they would feel when he slipped through their fingers; and then he began to row.

Rolf did not over-heat himself with too much exertion. He permitted his foes to gain a little upon him, though he might have preserved the distance for as long as his strength could have held out against that of the four in the other boat. They ceased their shouting when they saw how quietly he took his danger. They really believed

AND THAT VESSEL, HE KNEW, WAS THE PIRATE SCHOONER

that he was not aware of being their object, and hoped to seize him suddenly, before he had time to resist.

When very near the islet, however, Rolf became more active, and his skiff disappeared behind its southern point while the enemy's boat was still two furlongs off. The steersman looked for the reappearance of the canoe beyond the islet; but he looked in vain. He thought, and his companions agreed with him, that it was foolish of Rolf to land upon the islet, where they could lay hands on him in a moment; but they could only suppose he had done this, and prepared to do the same. They rowed quite round the islet; but, to their amazement, they could not only perceive no place to land at, but there was no trace of the canoe. It seemed to them as if those calm and clear waters had swallowed up the skiff and Rolf, in a few minutes after they had lost sight of him. Hund thought the case was accounted for, when he recalled Nipen's displeasure. A thrill ran through him as he said to himself that the spirits of the region had joined with him against Rolf, and swallowed up, almost before his eyes, the man he hated. He put his hands before his face, for a moment, while his comrades stared at him: then, thinking he must be under a delusion, he gazed earnestly over the waters, as far as he could see. They lay calm and bright; and there was certainly no kind of vessel on their surface for miles round.

The rowers wondered, questioned, uttered shouts, spoke all together, and then looked at Hund in silence, struck by his countenance; and finished by rowing two or three times round the islet, slowly, and looking up its bare rocky sides, which rose like walls from the water; but nothing could they see or hear. When tired of their fruitless search they returned to the schooner, ready to report to the master that the fiord was enchanted.

Meantime, Rolf had heard every splash of their oars, and every tone of their voices, as they rowed round his place of refuge. He was not on the islet, but in it. This was such an island as Swein, the sea-king of former days, took refuge in; and Rolf was only following his example. Long before, he had discovered a curious cleft in the rock, very narrow, and all but invisible at high water, even if

a bush of dwarf ash and birch had not hung down over it. At high water, nothing larger than a bird could go in and out beneath the low arch; but there was a cavern within, whose sandy floor sloped up to some distance above high-water mark. In this cavern was Rolf. He had thrust his little skiff between the walls of rock, crushing in its sides as he did so. The bushes drooped behind him, hanging naturally over the entrance as before. Rolf pulled up his broken vessel upon the little sandy beach within the cave; saved a pile of his fish, and returned a good many to the water; and then sat down upon the sea-weeds to listen. There was no light but a little which found its way through the busy screen, and up from the green water; and the sounds—the tones of the pirates' voices, and the splash of the waters against the rocky walls of his singular prison—came deadened and changed to his ear. Yet he heard enough to be aware how long his enemies remained, and when they were really gone.

It was a prison indeed, as Rolf reflected when he looked upon his broken skiff. He could not imagine how he was to get away; for his friends would certainly never think of coming to look for him here; but he put off the consideration of this point for the present, and turned away from the image of Erica's distress when he should fail to return. He amused himself now with imagining Hund's disappointment, and the reports which would arise from it; and he found this so very entertaining, that he laughed aloud; and then the echo of his laughter sounded so very merry, that it set him laughing again. This, in its turn, seemed to rouse the eider-ducks that thronged the island, and their clatter and commotion was so great overhead, that any spectator might have been excused for believing that Vogel islet was indeed bewitched.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A SUMMER APARTMENT

"HUMPH! how little did the rare old sea-king think," said Rolf to himself, as he surveyed his cave—"how little did Swein think, when he played this very trick, six hundred years ago, that it would save a poor farm-servant from being murdered, so many centuries after! Many thanks to my good grandmother for being so fond of that story! She taught it thoroughly to me before she died: and that is the reason of my being safe at this moment. I wish I had told the people at home of my having found this cave: for, as it is, they cannot but think me lost; and how Erica will bear it, I don't know. And yet, if I had told them, Hund would have heard it, or, at least, Stiorna, and she would have managed to let him know. Perhaps it is best as it is, if only I can get back in time to save Erica's heart from breaking. But for her, I should not mind the rest being in a fright for a day or two. They are a little apt to fancy that the affairs of the farm go by nature—that the fields and the cattle take care of themselves. They treat me liberally enough; but they are not fully aware of the value of a man like me; and now they will learn. They will hardly know how to make enough of me when I go back. Oddo will be the first to see me. I think, however, I should let them hear my best song from a distance. Let me see—which song shall it be? It must be one which will strike Peder; for he will be the first to hear, as Oddo always is to see. Some of them will think it is a spirit mocking, and some that it is my ghost: and my master and madame will take it to be nothing but my own self. And then, in the doubt among all these, my poor Erica will faint away; and while they are throwing water upon her face, and putting some camphorated brandy into her mouth, I shall quietly step in among them, and grasp Peder's arm, and pull Oddo's hair, to

show that it is I myself; and when Erica opens her eyes she shall see my face at its very merriest; so that she cannot possibly take me for a sad and solemn ghost. And the next thing will be——"

He stopped with a start, as his eye fell upon his crushed boat, lying on its side, half in the water and half out.

"Ah!" thought he, in a changed mood—"this is all very fine, this planning how one pleasant thing will follow upon another; but I forgot the first thing of all. I must learn first how I am to get out."

He turned his boat about and about, and shook his head over every bruise, hole, or crack that he found, till he finished with a nod of decision that nothing could be done with it. He was a good swimmer; but the nearest point of the shore was so far off that it would be all he could do to reach it when the waters were in their most favourable state. At present, they were so chilled with the melted snows that were pouring down from every steep along the fiord, that he doubted the safety of attempting to swim at all. What chance of release had he then?

If he could by any means climb upon the rocks, in whose recesses he was now hidden, he might possibly fall in with some fishing-boat which would fetch him off; but, besides that the pirates were more likely to see him than anybody else, he believed there was no way by which he could climb upon the islet. It had always been considered the exclusive property of the aquatic birds with which it swarmed, because its sides rose so abruptly from the water, so like the smooth stone walls of a lofty building that there was no hold for foot or hand, and the summit seemed unattainable by anything that had not wings. Rolf remembered, however, having heard Peder say that when he was young, there might be seen hanging down one part of the precipice the remains of a birchen ladder, which must have been made and placed there by human hands. Rolf determined that he would try the point. He would wait till the tide was flowing in, as the waters from the open sea were somewhat less chilled than when returning from the head of the fiord: he would take the waters at their warmest, and try and try again to

make a footing upon the islet. Meantime, he would not trouble himself with thoughts of being a prisoner.

His cave was really a very pretty place. As its opening fronted the west, he found that even here there might be sunshine. The golden light which blesses the high and low places of the earth did not disdain to cheer and adorn even this humble chamber, which, at the bidding of nature, the waters had patiently scooped out of the hard rock. Some hours after darkness had settled down on the lands of the tropics, and long after the stars had come out in the skies over English heads, this cave was at its brightest. As the sun drew to its setting, near the middle of the Nordland summer night, it levelled its golden rays through the cleft, and made the place far more brilliant than at noon. The projections of the rough rock caught the beam, during the few minutes that it stayed, and shone with a bright orange tint. The beach suddenly appeared of a more dazzling white, and the waters of a deeper green, while, by their motion, they cast quivering circles of reflected light upon the roof, which had before been invisible. Rolf took this brief opportunity to survey his abode carefully. He had supposed, from the pleasant freshness of the air, that the cave was lofty; and he now saw that the roof did indeed spring up to a vast height. He saw also that there was a great deal of drift-wood accumulated; and some of it thrown into such distant corners as to prove that the waves could dash up to a much higher water-line, in stormy weather, than he had supposed. No matter! He hoped to be gone before there were any more storms. Tired and sleepy as he was, so near midnight, he made an exertion, while there was plenty of light, to clear away the sea-weeds from a space on the sand where he must to-morrow make his fire, and broil his fish. The smell of the smallest quantity of burnt weed would be intolerable in so confined a place; so he cleared away every sprout of it, and laid some of the drift-wood on a spot above high-water mark; picking out the driest pieces of firewood he could find for kindling a flame.

When this was done, he could have found it in his heart to pick up shells—so various and beautiful were those which strewed the floor of his cave—but the sunbeam was

rapidly climbing the wall, and would presently be gone, so he let the shells lie till the next night (if he should still be here), and made haste to heap up a bed of fine dry sand in a corner; and here he lay down as the twilight darkened, and thought he had never rested on so soft a bed. He knew it was near high water, and he tried to keep awake, to ascertain how nearly the tide filled up the entrance; but he was too weary, and his couch was too comfortable for this. His eyes closed in spite of him; and he dreamed that he was broad awake watching the height of the tide. For this one night he could rest without any very painful thoughts of poor Erica; for she was prepared for his remaining out till the middle of the next day, at least.

When he awoke in the morning, the scene was marvellously changed from that on which he had closed his eyes. His cave was so dim that he could scarcely distinguish its white floor from its rocky sides. The water was low, and the cleft therefore enlarged; so that he saw at once that now was the time for making his fire—now when there was the freest access for the air. Yet he could not help pausing to admire what he saw. He could see now a long strip of the fiord—a perspective of waters and of shores, ending in a lofty peak still capped with snow, and glittering in the sunlight. The whole landscape was bathed in light, as warm as noon; for, though it was only six in the morning, the sun had been up for several hours. As Rolf gazed, and reckoned up the sum of what he saw—the many miles of water, and the long range of rocks—he felt for a moment as if not yet secure from Hund, as if he must be easily visible while he saw so much. But it was not so, and Rolf smiled at his own momentary fear when he remembered how, as a child, he had tried to count the stars he could see at once through a hole pricked by a needle in a piece of paper, and how, for that matter, all that we ever see is through the little circle of the pupil of the eye. He smiled when he considered that while, from his recess, he could see the united navy of Norway and Denmark, if anchored in the fiord, his enemy could not see even his habitation, otherwise than by peeping under the bushes which overhung the cleft; and this only at low water. So he began to sing, while rubbing together, with

all his might, the dry sticks of fir with which his fire was to be kindled. First they smoked, and then, by a skilful breath of air, they blazed, and set fire to the heap; and by the time the herrings were ready for broiling, the cave was so filled with smoke that Rolf's singing was turned to coughing.

Some of the smoke hung in soot on the roof and walls of the cave, curling up so well at first that Rolf almost thought there must be some opening in the lofty roof which served as a chimney. But there was not; and some of the smoke came down again, issuing at last from the mouth of the cave. Rolf observed this; and, seeing the danger of his place of retreat being thus discovered, he made haste to finish his cookery, resolving that, if he had to remain here for any length of time, he would always make his fire in the night. He presently threw water over his burning brands, and hoped that nothing had been seen of the process of preparing his breakfast.

The smoke had been seen, however, and by several people; but in such a way as to lead to no discovery of the cave. From the schooner, Hund kept his eyes fixed on the islet, at every moment he had to spare. Either he was the murderer of his fellow-servant, or the islet was bewitched; and if Rolf was under the protection and favour of the powers of the region, he, Hund, was out of favour, and might expect bad consequences. Whichever might be the case, Hund was very uneasy; and he could think of nothing but the islet, and look no other way. His companions had at first joked him about his luck in getting rid of his enemies; but, being themselves superstitious, they caught the infection of his gravity, and watched the spot almost as carefully as he.

As their vessel lay higher up in the fiord than the islet, they were on the opposite side from the crevice, and could not see from whence the smoke issued. But they saw it in the form of a light cloud hanging over the place. Hund's eyes were fixed upon it, when one of his comrades touched him on the shoulder. Hund started.

"You see there," said the man, pointing.

"To be sure I do. What else was I looking at?"

"Well, what is it?" inquired the man. "Has your

friend got a visitor—come a great way this morning? They say the mountain-sprite travels in mist. If so, it is now going. See, there it sails off—melts away. It is as like common smoke as anything that ever I saw. What say you to taking the boat, and trying again whether there is no place where your friend might not land, and be now making a fire among the birds' nests?"

"Nonsense!" cried Hund. "What became of the skiff, then?"

"True," said the man; and, shaking his head, he passed on, and spoke to the master.

In his own secret mind, the master of the schooner did not quite like his present situation. The little harbour was well sheltered and hidden from the observation of the inhabitants of the upper part of the fiord; but, after hearing the words dropped by his crew, the master did not relish being stationed between the bewitched islet and the head of the fiord, where all the residents were, of course, enemies. He thought that it would be wiser to have a foe only on the one hand, and the open sea on the other, even at the sacrifice of the best anchorage. As there was now a light wind, enough to take his vessel down, he gave orders accordingly.

Slowly, and at some distance, the schooner passed the islet, and all on board crowded together to see what they could see. None—not even the master with his glass—saw anything remarkable; but all heard something. There was a faint muffled sound of knocks—blows such as were never heard in a mere haunt of sea-birds. It was evident that the birds were disturbed by it. They rose and fell, made short flights and came back again, fluttered, and sometimes screamed so as to overpower all other sounds. But if they were quiet for a minute, the knock, knock, was heard again, with great regularity, and every knock went to Hund's heart.

The fact was that, after breakfast, Rolf soon became tired of having nothing to do. The water was so very cold that he deferred till noon the attempt to swim round the islet. He once more examined his boat; and, though the injuries done seemed irreparable, he thought he had better

try to mend his little craft than do nothing. After collecting from the wood in the cave all the nails that happened to be sticking in it, and all the pieces that were sound enough to patch a boat with, he made a stone serve him for a hammer, straightened his nails upon another stone, and tried to fasten on a piece of wood over a hole. It was discouraging work enough; but it helped to pass the hours till the restless waters should have reached their highest mark in the cave, when he would know that it was noon, and time for his little expedition.

He sighed as he threw down his awkward new tools and pulled off his jacket, for his heart now began to grow very heavy. It was about the time when Erica would be beginning to look for his return; and when or how he was ever to return he became less able to imagine, the more he thought about it. As he fancied Erica gazing down the fiord from the gallery, or stealing out, hour after hour, to look forth from the beach, and only to be disappointed every time, till she would be obliged to give him quite up and yield to despair, Rolf shed tears. It was the first time for some years—the first time since he had been a man; and when he saw his own tears fall upon the sand, he was ashamed. He blushed, as if he had not been all alone, dashed away the drops, and threw himself into the water.

It was too cold by far for safe swimming. All the snows of Sulitelma could hardly have made the waters more chilly to the swimmer than they felt at the first plunge. But Rolf would not retreat for this reason. He thought of the sunshine outside, and of the free open view he should enjoy, dived beneath the almost closed entrance, and came up on the other side. The first thing he saw was the schooner, now lying below his island, and the next thing was a small boat between him and it, evidently making towards him. When convinced that Hund was one of the three men in it, he saw that he must go back, or make haste to finish his expedition. He made haste, swam round so close as to touch the warm rock in many places, and could not discover, any more than before, any trace of a footing by which a man might climb to the summit. There was a crevice or two, however, from which

vegetation hung, still left unsearched. He could not search them now, for he must make haste home.

The boat was indeed so near when he had reached the point he set out from, that he used every effort to conceal himself; and it seemed that he could only have escaped by the eyes of his enemies being fixed on the summit of the rock. When once more in the cave he rather enjoyed hearing them come nearer and nearer, so that the bushes which hung down between him and them shook with the wind of their oars, and dipped into the waves. He laughed silently when he heard one of them swear that he would not leave the spot till he had seen something, upon which another rebuked his presumption. Presently a voice, which he knew to be Hund's, called upon his name, at first gently, and then more and more loudly, as if taking courage at not being answered.

"I will wait till he rounds the point," thought Rolf, "and then give him such an answer as may send a guilty man away quicker than he came."

He waited till they were on the opposite side, so that his voice might appear to come from the summit of the islet, and then began with the melancholy sound used to lure the plover on the moors. The men in the boat instantly observed that this was the same sound used when Erlingsen's boat was spirited away from them. It was rather singular that Rolf and Oddo should have used the same sound; but they probably chose it as the most mournful they knew. Rolf, however, did not stop there. He moaned louder and louder, till the sound resembled the bellowing of a tormented spirit enclosed in the rock; and the consequence was, as he had said, that his enemies retreated faster than they came. Never had they rowed more vigorously than now, fetching a large circuit, to keep at a safe distance from the spot as they passed westward.

For the next few days Rolf kept a close watch upon the proceedings of the pirates, and saw enough of their thievery to be able to lay information against them, if ever he should again make his way to a town or village, and see the face of a magistrate. He was glad of the interest and occupation thus afforded him, of even this slight hope

HE SOMETIMES HAMMERED A LITTLE AT HIS SKIFF

of being useful; for he saw no more probability than on the first day, of release from his prison. The worst of it was that the season for boating was nearly at an end. The inhabitants were day by day driving their cattle up the mountains, there to remain for the summer; and the heads of families remained in the farmhouses almost alone, and little likely to put out so far into the fiord as to pass near him. So poor Rolf could only catch fish for his support, swim round and round his prison, and venture a little farther on days when the water felt rather less cold than usual. To drive off thoughts of his poor distressed Erica, he sometimes hammered a little at his skiff; but it was too plain that no botching that he could perform in the cave would render the broken craft safe to float in.

One sunny day, when the tide was flowing in warmer than usual, Rolf amused himself with more evolutions in bathing than he had hitherto indulged in. He forgot his troubles and his foes in diving, floating, and swimming. As he dashed round a point of a rock, he saw something, and was certain he was seen. Hund appeared at least as much bewitched as the islet itself, for he could not keep away from it. He seemed irresistibly drawn to the scene of his guilt and terror. Here he was now, with one other man, in the schooner's smallest boat. Rolf had to determine in an instant what to do; for they were within a hundred yards, and Hund's starting eyes showed that he saw what he took for the ghost of his fellow-servant. Rolf raised himself as high as he could out of the water, throwing his arms up above his head, fixed his eyes on Hund, uttered a shrill cry, and dived, hoping to rise to the surface at some point out of sight. Hund looked no more. After one shriek of terror and remorse had burst from his white lips, he sank his head upon his knee and let his comrade take all the trouble of rowing home again.

This vision decided Hund's proceedings. Half-crazed with remorse, he left the pirates that night. After long considerations where to go, he decided upon returning to Erlingsen's. He did not know to what extent they suspected him; he was pretty sure that they held no proofs against him. Nowhere else could he be sure of honest work—the first object with him now in the midst of his

remorse. He felt irresistibly drawn towards poor Erica, now that no rival was there; and if mixed with all these considerations there were some thoughts of the situation of houseman being vacant, and needing much to be filled up, it is no wonder that such a mingling of motives took place in a mind so selfish as Hund's.

## CHAPTER IX

### HUND'S REPORT

HUND performed his journey by night—a journey perfectly unlike any that was ever performed by night in England. He did not for a moment think of going by the fiord, short and easy as it would have been in comparison with the land road. He would rather have mounted all the steeps and crossed the snows of Sulitelma itself, many times over, than have put himself in the way a second time of such a vision as he had seen. Laboriously and diligently therefore he overcame the difficulties of the path, crossing ravines, wading through swamps, scaling rocks, leaping across water-courses, and only now and then throwing himself down on some tempting slope of grass, to wipe his brows, and, where opportunity offered, to moisten his parched throat with the wild strawberries which were fast ripening in the sheltered nooks of the hills. It was now so near midsummer, and the nights were so fast melting into the days, that Hund could at the latest scarcely see a star, though there was not a fleece of cloud in the whole circle of the heavens. While yet the sun was sparkling on the fiord, and glittering on every farmhouse window that fronted the west, all around was as still as if the deepest darkness had settled down. The eagles were at rest on their rocky ledge, a thousand feet above the waters. The herons had left their stand on their several promontories of the fiord, and the flapping of their wings overhead was no more heard. The raven was gone home; the cattle were all far away on the mountain pasture; the goats were hidden in the woods, which yielded the tender shoots on which they subsisted. The round eyes of a white owl stared out upon him here and there from under the eaves of a farmhouse; and these seemed to be the only eyes besides his own that were open. Hund knew as he passed one dwelling after another—

knew as well as if he had looked in at the windows—that the inhabitants were all asleep, even with the sunshine lying across their very faces.

Every few minutes he observed how his shadow lengthened, and he longed for the brief twilight which would now soon be coming on. Now, his shadow stretched quite across a narrow valley, as he took breath on a ridge crossed by the soft breeze. Then the shadow stood up against a precipice, taller than the tallest pine upon the steep. Then the yellow gleam grew fainter, the sparkles on the water went out, and he saw the large pale circle of the sun sink and sink into the waves, where the fiord spread out wide to the south-west. Even the weary spirit of this unhappy man seemed now to be pervaded with some of the repose which appeared to be shed down for the benefit of all that lived. He walked on and on, but he felt the grass softer under his feet—the air cooler upon his brow; and he began to comfort himself with thinking that he had not murdered Rolf. He said to himself that he had not laid a finger on him, and that the skiff might have sunk exactly as it did if he had been sitting at home, carving a bell-collar. There could be no doubt that the skiff had been pulled down fathoms deep by a strong hand from below; and if the spirits were angry with Rolf, that was no concern of Rolf's human enemies. Thus Hund strove to comfort himself; but it would not do. The more he tried to put away the thought, the more obstinately it returned, that he had been speeding on his way to injure Rolf when the strange disappearance took place; and that he had long hated and envied his fellow-servant, however marvellously he had been prevented from capturing or slaying him. These thoughts had no comfort in them; but better came after a time.

He had to pass very near M. Kollsen's abode, and it crossed his mind that it would be a great relief to open his heart to a clergyman. He halted for a minute in sight of the house, but presently went on, saying to himself that he could not say all to M. Kollsen, and would therefore say nothing. He would get a lecture against superstition, and hear hard words of the powers he dreaded; and there would be no consolation in this. It was said

that the Bishop of Tronyem was coming round this way soon, in his regular progress through his diocese, and everybody bore testimony to his gentleness and mercy. It would be best to wait for his coming. Then Hund began to calculate how soon he would come, for aching hearts are impatient of relief; and the thought how near midsummer was, made him look up into the sky—that beautifull index of the seasons in a northern climate. There were a few extremely faint stars—a very few—for only the brightest could now show themselves in the sky where daylight lingered so as never quite to depart. A pale green hue remained where the sun had disappeared, and a deep red glow was even now beginning to kindle where he was soon to rise. Just here, Hund's ear caught some tones of the soft harp music which the winds make in their passage through a wood of pines; and there was a fragrance in the air from a new thatch of birch-bark just laid upon a neighbouring roof. This fragrance, that faint vibrating music, and the soft veiled light, were soothing; and when, besides, Hund pictured to himself his mind relieved by a confession to the good bishop—perhaps cheered by words of pardon and of promise, the tears burst from his eyes, and the fever of his spirit was allayed.

Then up came the sun again, and the new thatch reeked in his beams, and the birds shook off sleep and plumed themselves, and the peak of Sulitelma blushed with the softest rose-colour, and the silvery fish leaped out of the water, and the blossoms in the gardens opened, though it was only an hour after midnight. Every creature except man seemed eager to make the most of the short summer season—to waste none of its bright hours, which would be gone too soon—every creature except man. But man must have rest, be the sun high or sunk beneath the horizon; so that Hund saw no face, and heard no human voice, before he found himself standing at the top of the steep rocky pathway which led down to Erlingsen's abode.

Hund might have known that he should find everything in a different state from that in which he had left the place; but yet he was rather surprised at the aspect of the farm. The stable-doors stood wide, and there was no trace of milk-pails. The hurdles of the fold were piled

upon one another in a corner of the yard. It was plain that herd, flock, and dairy-women were gone to the mountain; and though Hund dreaded meeting Erica, it struck upon his heart to think that she was not here. He felt now how much it was for her sake that he had come back.

He half resolved to go away again; but from the gallery of the house some snow-white sheets were hanging to dry, and this showed that some neat and busy female hands were still here. Next, his eye fell upon the boat which lay gently rocking with the receding tide in its tiny cove; and he resolved to lie down in it and rest, while considering what to do next. He went down, stepping gently over the pebbles of the beach, lest his tread should reach and waken any ear through the open windows, lay down at the bottom of the boat, and, as might have been expected, fell asleep as readily as an infant in a cradle.

Of course he was discovered; and, of course, Oddo was the discoverer. Oddo was the first to come forth, to water the one horse that remained at the farm, and to give a turn and a shake to the two or three little cocks of hay which had been mown behind the house. His quick eye noted the deep marks of a man's feet in the sand and pebbles below high-water mark, proving that some one had been on the premises during the night. He followed these marks to the boat, where he was amazed to find the enemy (as he called Hund) fast asleep. Oddo was in a great hurry to tell his grandfather (Erlingsen being on the mountain); but he thought it only proper caution to secure his prize from escaping in his absence.

He summoned his companion, the dog which had warned him of many dangers abroad, and helped him faithfully with his work at home; and nothing could be clearer to Skorro than that he was to crouch on the thwarts of the boat, with his nose close to Hund's face, and not to let Hund stir till Oddo came back. Then Oddo ran, and wakened his grandfather, who made all haste to rise and dress. Erica now lived in Peder's house. She had taken her lover's place there since his disappearance, as the old man must be taken care of, and the house kept; and her mistress thought the interest and occupa-

tion good for her. Hearing Oddo's story, she rushed out, and her voice was soon heard in passionate entreaty, above the bark of the dog, which was trying to prevent the prisoner from rising.

"Only tell me," Erica was heard to say, "only tell me where and how he died. I know he is dead—I knew he would die; from that terrible night when we were betrothed. Tell me who did it—for I am sure you know. Was it Nipen? Yes, it was Nipen, whether it was done by wind or water, or human hands. But speak and tell me where he is. O Hund, speak! Say only where his body is, and I will try—I will try never to speak to you again—never to——"

Hund looked miserable; he moved his lips, but no sound was heard mingling with Erica's rapid speech.

Madame Erlingsen, who, with Orga, had by this time reached the spot, laid her hand on Erica's arm, to beg for a moment's silence, made Oddo call his dog out of the boat, and then spoke, in a severe tone, to Hund.

"Why do you shake your head, Hund, and speak no word? Say what you know, for the sake of those whom, we grievously suspect, you have deeply injured. Say what you know, Hund."

"What I say is, that I do not know," replied Hund in a hoarse and agitated voice. "I only know that we live in an enchanted place, here by this fiord, and that the spirits try to make us answer for their doings. The very first night after I went forth, this very boat was spirited away from me, so that I could not come home. Nipen had a spite against me there—to make you all suspect me. I declare to you that the boat was gone, in a twinkling, by magic, and I heard the cry of the spirit that took it."

"What was the cry like?" asked Oddo gravely.

"Where were you, that you were not spirited away with the boat?" asked his mistress.

"I was tumbled out upon the shore, I don't know how," declared Hund; "found myself sprawling on a rock, while the creature's cries brought my heart into my mouth as I lay."

"Alone? Were you alone?" asked his mistress.

"I had landed the pastor some hours before, madame;

and I took nobody else with me, as Stiorna can tell, for she saw me go."

"Stiorna is at the mountain," observed madame coolly.

"But, Hund," said Oddo, "how did Nipen take hold of you when it laid you sprawling on the rock? Neck and heels? Or did it bid you go and hearken whether the pirates were coming, and whip away the boat before you came back? Are you quite sure that you sprawled on the rock at all before you ran away from the horrible cry you speak of? Our rocks are very slippery when Nipen is at one's heels."

Hund stared at Oddo, and his voice was yet hoarser when he said that he had long thought that boy was a favourite with Nipen, and he was sure of it now.

Erica had thrown herself down on the sand, hiding her face on her hands, on the edge of the boat, as if in despair of her misery being attended to—her questions answered. Old Peder stood beside her, stroking her hair tenderly, and he now spoke the things she could not.

"Attend to me, Hund," said Peder, in the grave, quiet tone which every one regarded. "Hear my words, and for your own sake answer them. We suspect you of being in communication with the pirates yonder; we suspect that you went to meet them when you refused to go hunting the bears. We know that you have long felt ill-will towards Rolf—envy of him—jealousy of him—and——"

Here Erica looked up, pale as ashes, and said: "Do not question him further. There is no truth in his answers. He spoke falsehood even now."

Peder knew how Hund shrank under this, and thought the present the moment to get truth out of him, if he ever could speak it. He therefore went on to say—

"We suspect you of having done something to keep your rival out of the way, in order that you might obtain the house and situation—and perhaps something else that you wish."

"Have you killed him?" asked Erica abruptly, looking full in his face.

"No," returned Hund firmly. From his manner everybody believed this much.

"Do you know that anybody else has killed him?"

"No."

"Do you know whether he is alive or dead?"

To this Hund could, in the confusion of his ideas about Rolf's fate and condition, fairly say "No;" as also to the question, "Do you know where he is?"

Then they all cried out—

"Tell us what you do know about him."

"Ah, there you come," said Hund, resuming some courage, and putting on the appearance of more than he had. "You load me with foul accusations, and when you find yourselves all in the wrong, you alter your tone, and put yourselves under obligation to me for what I will tell. I will treat you better than you treat me, and I will tell you plainly why. I repent of my feelings towards my fellow-servant, now that evil has befallen him——"

"What? Oh, what?" cried Erica.

"He was seen fishing on the fiord in that poor little worn-out skiff. I myself saw him. And when I looked next for the skiff, it was gone—it had disappeared."

"And where were you?"

"Never mind where I was. I was not with him, but about my own business. And I tell you, I no more laid a finger on him or his skiff than any one of you."

"Where was it?"

"Close by Vogel islet."

Erica started, and in one moment's flush of hope told that Rolf had said he should be safe at any time near Vogel islet. Hund caught at her words so eagerly as to make a favourable impression on all, who saw, what was indeed the truth, that he would have been glad to know that Rolf was alive. Their manner so changed towards Hund that if Stiorna had been there she would have triumphed. But the more they considered the case, the more improbable it seemed that Rolf should have escaped drowning.

"Mother, what do you think?" whispered the gentle Orga.

"I think, my dear, that we shall never forgive ourselves for letting Rolf go out in that old skiff."

"Then you think—you feel quite sure, mother, that Nipen had nothing to do with it?"

"I feel confident, my dear, that there is no such being as Nipen."

"Even after all that has happened?—after this, following upon Oddo's prank that night?"

"Even so, Orga. We suffer by our own carelessness and folly, my love; and it makes us neither wiser nor better to charge the consequences upon evil spirits—to charge our good God with permitting revengeful beings to torment us, instead of learning from His chastisements to sin in the same way no more."

"But, mother, if you are right, how very far wrong all these others are!"

"It is but little, my child, that the wisest of us know; but there is a whole eternity before us, every one, to grow wise in. Some," and she looked towards Oddo, "may outgrow their mistakes here; and others," looking at old Peder, "are travelling fast towards a place where everybody is wiser than years or education can make us here. Your father and I do wish for Frolich and you, that you should rest your reverence, your hopes and fears, on none but the good God. Do we not know that not even a sparrow falleth to the ground without His will?"

"Poor Erica would be less miserable if she could think so," sighed Orga. "She will die soon if she goes on to suffer as she does. I wish the good bishop would come, for I do not think M. Kollsen gives her any comfort. Look now! what can she have to say to Hund?"

What Erica had to say to Hund was—

"I believe some of the things you have told. I believe that you did not lay hands on Rolf."

"Bless you! Bless you for that!" interrupted Hund, almost forgetting how far he really was guilty in the satisfaction of hearing these words from the lips that spoke them.

"Tell me then," proceeded Erica, "how you believe he really perished. Do you fully believe he perished?"

"I believe," whispered Hund, "that the strong hand pulled him down—down to the bottom."

"I knew it," said Erica, turning away.

"Erica—one word," exclaimed Hund. "I must stay here—I am very miserable, and I must stay here and

work, and work till I get some comfort. But you must tell me how you think of me—you must say that you do not hate me——"

"I do hate you," said Erica with disgust, as her suspicions of his wanting to fill Rolf's place were renewed, "I mistrust you, Hund, more deeply than I can tell."

"Will no penitence change your feelings, Erica? I tell you I am as miserable as you."

"That is false, like everything else that you say," cried Erica. "I wish you would go—go and seek Rolf under the waters."

Hund shuddered at the thought, as it recalled what he had seen and heard at the islet. Erica saw this, and sternly repeated—

"Go and bring back Rolf from the deeps, and then I will cease to hate you. Ah! I see the despair in your face. Such despair never came from any woman's words where there was not a bad conscience to back them."

Hund felt that this was true, and made no reply.

As Erica slowly returned into Peder's house, Oddo ran past, and was there before her. He closed the door when she had entered, put his hand within hers, and said—

"Did Rolf really tell you that he should be safe anywhere near Vogel islet?"

"Yes," sighed Erica, "safe from the pirates. That was his answer when I begged him not to go so far down the fiord; but Rolf always had an answer when one asked him not to go into danger. You see how it ended—and he never would believe in *that* danger."

"I shall never be happy again if this is Nipen's doing," said Oddo. "But, Erica, you went one trip with me, and I know you are brave. Will you go another? Will you go to the islet and see what Rolf could have meant about being safe there?"

Erica brightened for a moment, and perhaps would have agreed to go; but Peder came in, and Peder said he knew the islet well, and that it was universally considered that it was now inaccessible to human foot, and that that was the reason why the fowl flourished there as they did in no other place. Erica must not be permitted to go so far down among the haunts of the pirates.

Instead of this, her mistress had just decided that, as there were no present means of getting rid of Hund—as indeed his depressed state of spirits seemed to give him some title to be received again—and as Erica could not be expected to remain just now in his presence, she should set off immediately for the mountain, and request Erlingsen to come home. This was only hastening her departure by two or three days. At the seater she would find less to try her spirits than here; and when Erlingsen came, he would, if he thought proper, have Hund carried before a magistrate, and would at least set such inquiries afloat through the whole region as would bring to light anything that might chance to be known of Rolf's fate.

Erica could not deny that this was the best plan that could be pursued, though she had no heart for going to the seater any more than for doing anything else. Under Peder's urgency, however, she made up her bundle of clothes, took in her hand her lure,[1] with which to call home the cattle in the evenings, bade her mistress farewell privately, and stole away without Hund's knowledge, while Oddo was giving him meat and drink within the house. Old Peder listened to her parting footsteps, and her mistress watched her up the first hill, thinking to herself how unlike this was to the usual cheerful departure to the mountain dairies. Never, indeed, had a heavier heart burdened the footsteps of the wayfarer about to climb the slopes of Sulitelma.

[1] The lure is a wooden trumpet, nearly five feet long, made of two hollow pieces of birch-wood, bound together throughout the whole length with slips of willow. It is used to call the cattle together on a wide pasture; and is also carried by travelling parties, to save the risk of any one being lost in the wilds. Its notes, which may be heard to a great distance, are extremely harsh and discordant, having none of the musical tone of the Alp-horn (the cow-horn used by the Swiss for the same purposes), which sounds well at a distance.

## CHAPTER X

### SEEKING THE UPLANDS

Now that the great occasion was come—that brightest day of the year—the day of going to the seater, how unlike was it to all that the lovers had imagined and planned! How unlike was the situation of the two! There was Rolf cooped up in a dim cave, his heart growing heavy as his ear grew weary of the incessant dash and echo of the waters! And here was Erica on the free mountain-side, where all was silent except the occasional rattle of a brook over the stones, and the hum of a cloud of summer flies. The lovers were alike in their unhappiness only; and hardly in this, so much the more wretched of the two was Erica.

The sun was hot, and her path occasionally lay under rocks which reflected the heat upon the passenger. She did not heed this, for the aching of her heart. Then she had to pass through a swamp, whence issued a host of mosquitoes, to annoy any who intruded upon their domain. It just occurred to Erica that Rolf made her pass this place on horseback last year well veiled, and completely defended from these stinging tormentors, but she did not heed them now. When, somewhat higher up, she saw in the lofty distance a sunny slope of long grass undulating in the wind like the surface of a lake, tears sprang into her eyes, for Rolf had said that when they came in sight of the waving pasture she would alight, and walk the rest of the way with him. Instead of this, and instead of the gay procession from the farm, musical with the singing of boys and girls, the lowing of the cows, and the bleating of the kids, all rejoicing together at going to the mountain, here she was alone, carrying a widowed heart, and wandering with unwilling steps farther and farther from the spot where she had last seen Rolf.

She dashed the tears from her eyes, and looked behind her at the entrance of a ravine which would hide from her the fiord and the dwelling she had left. Thor islet lay like a fragment of the leafy forest cast into the blue waters, but Vogel islet could not be seen. It was not too far down to be seen from an elevation like this, but it was hidden behind the promontories by which the fiord was contracted. Erica could see what she next looked for—knowing, as she did, precisely where to look. She could see the two graves belonging to the household—the two hillocks which were railed in behind the house—but she turned away, sickening at the thought that Rolf could not even have a grave; that that poor consolation was denied her. She looked behind her no more, but made her way rapidly through the ravine; the more rapidly because she had seen a man ascending by the same path at no great distance, and she had little inclination to be joined by a party of wandering Laplanders seeking a fresh pasture for their reindeer, still less by any neighbour from the fiord who might think civility required that he should escort her to the seater. This wayfarer was walking at a pace so much faster than hers that he would soon pass, and she would hide among the rocks beside the tarn [1] at the head of the ravine till he had gone by.

It was refreshing to come out of the hot steep ravine upon the grass at the upper end of it. Such grass! A line of pathway was trodden in it straight upwards by those who had before ascended the mountain, but Erica left this path and turned to the right to seek the tarn which there lay hidden among the rocks. The herbage was knee-deep and gay with flowers—with wild geranium, pansies, and especially with the yellow blossoms which give its peculiar hue and flavour to the Gammel cheese, and to the butter made in the mountain dairies of Norway. Through this rich pasture Erica waded till she reached the tarn which fed the stream that gambolled down the ravine. The death-cold unfathomed waters lay calm and still under the shelter of the rocks which nearly surrounded them. Even where crags did not rise abruptly from the water, huge blocks were scattered; masses which seemed

[1] Small lake upon a mountain.

to have lain so long as to have seen the springing herbage of a thousand summers.

In the shadow of one of these blocks, Erica sank down into the grass. There she, and her bundle, and her long lure were half-buried; and this, at last, felt something like rest. Here she would remain long enough to let the other wayfarer have a good start up the mountain, and by that time she should be cool and tranquillised—yes, tranquillised; for here she could seek that peace which never failed when she sought it as Christians may. She hid her face in the fragrant grass, and did not look up again till the grief of her soul was stilled. Then her eye and her heart were open to the beauty of the place which she had made her temple of worship, and she gazed around till she saw something that surprised her. A reindeer stood on the ridge, his whole form, from his branching head to his slender legs, being clearly marked against the bright sky. He was not alone. He was the sentinel set to watch on behalf of several companions—two or three being perched on ledges of the rock, browsing—one standing half-buried in the herbage of the pasture, and one on the margin of the water, drinking as he would not have dreamed of doing if the wind had not been in the wrong quarter for letting him know how near the hidden Erica was.

This pretty sight was soon over. In a few moments the whole company appeared to take flight all at once without her having stirred a muscle. Away they went with such speed and noiselessness that they appeared not to touch the ground. From point to point of the rock they sprang, and the last branchy head disappeared over the ridge almost before Erica could stand upright to see all she could of them.

She soon discovered the cause of their alarm. She thought it could not have been herself, and it was not. The traveller, who she had hoped was now some way up the mountain, was standing on the margin of the tarn, immediately opposite to her, so that the wind had carried the scent to the herd. The traveller saw her at the same moment that she perceived him, but Erica did not discover this, and sank down again into the grass, hoping so to remain undisturbed. She could not thus observe what

his proceedings were, but her ear soon informed her that he was close by. His feet were rustling in the grass.

She sat up, and took her bundle and her lure, believing now that she must accept the unwelcome civility of an escort for the whole of the rest of the way, and thinking that she might as well make haste and get it over. The man, however, seemed in no hurry. Before she could rise, he took his seat on the huge stone beside her, crossed his arms, made no greeting, but looked her full in the face.

She did not know the face, nor was it like any that she had ever seen. There was such long hair, and so much beard, that the eyes seemed the only feature which made any distinct impression. Erica's heart now began to beat violently. Though wishing to be alone, she had not dreamed of being afraid till now; but now it occurred to her that she was seeing the rarest of sights—one not seen twice in a century, no other than the mountain-demon. Sulitelma, as the highest mountain in Norway, was thought to be his favourite haunt; and considering his strange appearance and his silence, it could hardly be other than himself.

The test would be whether he would speak first; a test which she resolved to try, though it was rather difficult to meet and return the stare of such a neighbour without speaking. She could not keep this up for more than a minute; so she sprang to her feet, rested her lure upon her shoulder, took her bundle in her hand, and began to wade back through the high grass to the pathway, almost expecting, when she thought of her mother's fate, to be seized by a strong hand and cast into the unfathomable tarn, whose waters were said to well up from the centre of the earth. Her companion, however, merely walked by her side. As he did not offer to carry her bundle, he could be no countryman of hers. There was not a peasant in Nordland who would not have had more courtesy.

They walked quietly on till the tarn was left some way behind. Erica found she was not to die that way. Presently after, she came in sight of a settlement of Lapps —a cluster of low and dirty tents, round which some tame reindeer were feeding. Erica was not sorry to see these,

NO OTHER THAN THE MOUNTAIN-DEMON

though no one knew better than she the helpless cowardice of these people; and it was not easy to say what assistance they could afford against the mountain-demon. Yet they were human beings, and would appear in answer to a cry. She involuntarily shifted her lure, to be ready to utter a call. The stranger stopped to look at the distant tents, and Erica went on at the same pace. He presently overtook her, and pointed towards the Lapps with an inquiring look. Erica only nodded.

"Why you no speak?" growled the stranger in broken language.

"Because I have nothing to say," declared Erica, in the sudden vivacity inspired by the discovery that this was probably no demon. Her doubts were renewed, however, by the next question.

"Is the bishop coming?"

Now, none were supposed to have a deeper interest in the holy bishop's travels than the evil spirits of any region through which he was to pass.

"Yes, he is coming," replied Erica. "Are you afraid of him?"

The stranger burst into a loud laugh at her question: and very like a mocking fiend he looked, as his thick beard parted to show his wide mouth, with its two ranges of teeth. When he finished laughing, he said, "No, no—we no fear bishop."

"'We!'" repeated Erica to herself. "He speaks for his tribe as well as himself."

"We no fear bishop," said the stranger, still laughing. "You no fear——" and he pointed to the long stretch of path—the prodigious ascent before them.

Erica said there was nothing to fear on the mountain for those who did their duty to the powers, as it was her intention to do. Her first Gammel cheese was to be for him whose due it was, and it should be the best she could make.

This speech she thought would suit, whatever might be the nature of her companion. If it was the demon, she could do no more to please him than promise him his cheese.

Her companion seemed not to understand or attend

to what she said. He again asked if she was not afraid to travel alone in so dreary a place, adding that if his countrywomen were to be overtaken by a stranger like him, on the wilds of a mountain, they would scream and fly;—all which he acted very vividly, by way of making out his imperfect speech, and trying her courage at the same time.

When Erica saw that she had no demon for a companion, but only a foreigner, she was so much relieved as not to be afraid at all. She said that nobody thought of being frightened in summer-time in her country. Winter was the time for that. When the days were long, so that travellers knew their way, and when everybody was abroad, so that you could not go far without meeting a friend, there was nothing to fear.

"You go abroad to meet friends, and leave your enemy behind."

At the moment, he turned to look back. Erica could not now help watching him, and she cast a glance homewards too. They were so high up the mountain that the fiord and its shores were in full view; and more—for the river was seen in its windings from the very skirts of the mountain to the fiord, and the town of Saltdalen standing on its banks. In short, the whole landscape to the west lay before them, from Sulitelma to the point of the horizon where the islands and rocks melted into the sea.

The stranger had picked up an eagle's feather in his walk, and he now pointed with it to the tiny cove in which Erlingsen's farm might be seen, looking no bigger than an infant's toy, and said—

"Do you leave an enemy there, or is Hund now your friend?"

"Hund is nobody's friend, unless he happens to be yours," Erica replied, perceiving at once that her companion belonged to the pirates. "Hund is everybody's enemy; and, above all, he is an enemy to himself. He is a wretched man."

"The bishop will cure that," said the stranger. "He is coward enough to call in the bishop to cure all. When comes the bishop?"

"Next week."

"What day, and what hour?"

Erica did not choose to gratify so close a curiosity as this. She did not reply; and while silent, was not sorry to hear the distant sound of cattle-bells—and Erlingsen's cattle-bells too. The stranger did not seem to notice the sound, even though quickening his pace to suit Erica's, who pressed on faster when she believed protection was at hand. And yet the next thing the stranger said brought her to a full stop. He said he thought a part of Hund's business with the bishop would be to get him to disenchant the fiord, so that boats might not be spirited away almost before men's eyes, and that a rower and his skiff might not sink like lead one day, and the man may be heard the second day, and seen the third, so that there was no satisfactory knowledge as to whether he was really dead. Erica stopped, and her eager looks made the inquiry which her lips could not speak. Her eagerness put her companion on his guard, and he would explain no further than by saying that the fiord was certainly enchanted, and that strange tales were circulating all round its shores, very striking to a stranger; a stranger had nothing more to do with the wonders of a country than to listen to them. He wanted to turn the conversation back to Hund. Having found out that he was at Erlingsen's, he next tried to discover what he had said and done since his arrival. Erica told the little there was to tell—that he seemed full of sorrow and remorse. She told this in hope of a further explanation about drowned men being seen alive, but the stranger stopped when the bells were heard again, and a woman's voice singing, nearer still. He complimented Erica on her courage, and turned to go back the way he came.

"Stay," said Erica. "Do come to the dairy, now you are so near."

The man walked away rapidly.

"My master is here close at hand; he will be glad to see a stranger," she said, following him, with the feeling that her ony chance of hearing something of Rolf was departing. The stranger did not turn, but only walked on faster, and with longer strides, down the slope.

The only thing now to be done was to run forwards,

and send a messenger after him. Erica forgot heat, weariness, and the safety of her property, and ran on towards the singing voice. In five minutes she found the singer, Frolich, lying along the ground and picking cloud-berries, with which she was filling her basket for supper.

"Where is Erlingsen?—quick—quick!" cried Erica.

"My father? You may just see him with your good eyes—up there."

And Frolich pointed to a patch of verdure on a slope high up the mountain, where the gazer might just discern that there were haycocks standing, and two or three moving figures beside them.

"Stiorna is there to-day, besides Jan. They hope to finish this evening," said Frolich; "and so here I am, all alone; and I am glad you have come, to help me to have a good supper ready for them. Their hunger will beat all my berry-gathering."

"You are alone?" said Erica, discovering that it was well that the pirate had turned back when he did. "You alone, and gathering berries, instead of having an eye on the cattle! Who has an eye on the cattle?"[1]

"Why, no one," answered Frolich. "Come now, do not tease me with bidding me remember the Bishop of Tronyem's cattle. The underground people have something to do elsewhere to-day; they give no heed to us."

"We must give heed to them, however," said Erica. "Show me where the cattle are, and I will collect them, and have an eye on them till supper is ready."

"You shall do no such thing, Erica. You shall lie down here and pick berries with me, and tell me the news.

[1] It is a popular belief in Norway that there is a race of fairies or magicians living underground, who are very covetous of cattle; and that, to gratify their taste for large herds and flocks, they help themselves with such as graze on the mountains; making dwarfs of them to enable them to enter crevices of the ground, in order to descend to the subterranean pastures. This practice may be defeated, as the Norwegian herdsman believes, by his keeping his eye constantly on the cattle.

A certain Bishop of Tronyem lost his cattle by the herdsmen having looked away from them, beguiled by a spirit in the shape of a noble elk. The herdsmen, looking towards their charge again, saw them reduced to the size of mice just vanishing through a crevice in the hillside. Hence the Norwegian proverb used to warn any one to look after his property, "Remember the Bishop of Tronyem's cattle!"

That will rest you and me at the same time, for I am as tired of being alone, as you can be of climbing the mountain. But why are your hands empty? Who is to lend you clothes? And what will the cows say to your leaving your lure behind, when you know they like it so much better than Stiorna's?"

Erica explained that her bundle and lure were lying on the grass, a little way below; and Frolich sprang to her feet, saying that she would fetch them presently. Erica stopped her, and told her she must not go; nobody should go but herself. She could not answer to Erlingsen for letting one of his children follow the steps of a pirate, who might return at any moment.

Frolich had no longer any wish to go. She started off towards the sleeping-shed, and never stopped till she had entered it, and driven a provision-chest against the door, leaving Erica far behind.

Erica indeed was in no hurry to follow. She returned for her bundle and lure; and then, uneasy about the cattle being left without an eye upon them, and thus confided to the negligence of the underground people, she proceeded to an eminence where two or three of her cows were grazing, and there sounded her lure. She put her whole strength to it, in hope that others besides the cattle might appear in answer, for she was really anxious to see her master.

The peculiar and far from musical sounds did spread wide over the pastures and up the slopes, and through the distant woods, so that the cattle of another seater stood to listen, and her own cows began to move, leaving the sweetest tufts of grass, and rising up from their couches in the richest herbage, to converge towards the point whence she called. The far-off herdsman observed to his fellow that there was a new call among the pastures; and Erlingsen, on the upland, desired Jan and Stiorna to finish cocking the hay, and began his descent to his seater, to learn whether Erica had brought any news from home.

Long before he could appear, Frolich stole out trembling, and looking round her at every step. When she saw Erica she flew over the grass, and threw herself down in it at Erica's feet.

"Where is he?" she whispered. "Has he come back?"

"I have not seen him. I daresay he is far off by this time, at the Black Tarn, where I met with him."

"The Black Tarn! And do you mean that? No, you cannot meant that you came all the way together from the Black Tarn hither. Did you run? Did you fly? Did you shriek? Oh, what did you do, with a pirate at your heels?"

"By my side," said Erica. "We walked and talked."

"With a pirate! But how did you know it was a pirate? Did he tell you so?"

"No; and at first I thought"—and she sank her voice into a reverential whisper—"I thought for some time it was the demon of this place. When I found it was only a pirate, I did not mind."

"Only a pirate—did not mind!" exclaimed Frolich. "You are the strangest girl! you are the most perverse creature! You think nothing of a pirate walking at your elbow for miles; and you would make a slave of yourself and me about these underground people, that my father laughs at, and that nobody ever saw. Ah, you say nothing aloud, but I know you are saying in your own mind, 'Remember the Bishop of Tronyem's cattle.'"

"You want news," said Erica, avoiding as usual all conversation about her superstitions. "How will it please you that the bishop is coming?"

"Very much, if we had any chance of seeing him. Very much, whether we see him or not, if he can give any help—any advice. My poor Erica, I do not like to ask; but you have had no good news, I fear."

Erica shook her head.

"I saw that in your face in a moment. Do not speak about it till you tell my father. He may help you, I cannot; so do not tell me anything."

Erica was glad to take her at her word. She kissed Frolich's hand, which lay on her knee, in token of thanks, and then inquired whether any Gammel cheese was made yet.

"No," said Frolich, inwardly sighing for news. "We have the whey, but not sweet cream enough till after this evening's milking. So you are just in time."

Erica was glad, as she could not otherwise have been sure of the demon having his due.

"There is your father," said Erica. "Now do go and gather more berries, Frolich. There are not half enough; and you cannot be afraid of the pirate, with your father within call. Now, do go."

"You want me not to hear what you have to tell my father," said Frolich, unwilling to depart.

"That is very true. I shall tell him nothing till you are out of hearing. He can repeat to you what he pleases afterwards; and he will indulge you all the more for your giving him a good supper."

"So he will; and I will fill his cup myself," observed Frolich. "He says the corn-brandy is uncommonly good, and I will fill his cup till it will not hold another drop."

"You will not reach his heart that way, Frolich. He knows to a drop what his quantity is, and there he stops."

"I know where there are some manyberries [1] ripe," said Frolich; "and he likes them above all berries. They lie this way, at the edge of the swamp, where the pirate will never think of coming."

And off she went, as Erica rose from the grass to curtsy to Erlingsen on his approach.

[1] The Moltebœer, or Manyberries, so called from its clustered appearance. It is a delicious fruit, amber-coloured when ripe, and growing in marshy ground.

## CHAPTER XI

### DAIRY-MAIDS' TALK

It may be supposed that Erlingsen was anxious to be at home when he had heard Erica's story. He was not to be detained by any promise of berries and cream for supper. He put away the thought even of his hay, yet unfinished on the upland, and would hear nothing that Frolich had to say of his fatigue at the end of a long working day. He took some provision with him, drank off a glass of corn-brandy, kissed Frolich, promised to send news, and, if possible, more helping hands, and set off at a good pace down the mountain.

The party he left behind was but a dull one. When Jan came in to supper he became angry that he was left to get in the hay alone. Even Stiorna could not help him to-morrow, for the cheese-making had already been put off too long while waiting for Erica's arrival, and it must now be delayed no longer. It was true some one was to be sent from below; but such an one could not arrive before the next evening, and Jan would meanwhile have a long day alone, instead of having, as hitherto, his master for a comrade. Stiorna, for her part, was offended at the wish, openly expressed by all, that Hund might not be the person sent. She was sure he was the only proper person, but she saw that he would meet with no welcome except from her.

Scarcely a word was spoken (though the mountain-dairies have the reputation of being the merriest places in the world), till Erica and Frolich were about their cheese-making the next morning. Erica had rather have kept the cattle; but Frolich so earnestly begged that she would let Stiorna do that, as she could not destroy the cattle in her ill-humour, while she might easily spoil the cheese, that Erica put away her knitting, tied on her apron, tucked up her sleeves, and prepared for the great work.

"There, let her go!" cried Frolich, looking after Stiorna as she walked away slowly, trailing her lure after her. "She may knit all her ill-humour into her stocking if she likes, as Hund is to wear it, and that is better than putting it into our cheese. Erica," said the kind-hearted girl, "you are worth a hundred of her. What has she to disturb her, in comparison with you? and yet you do just what I ask you, and work at our business as if nothing was the matter. If you chose to cry all day on the two graves down there at home, nobody could think it unreasonable."

Erica was washing the bowls and cheese-moulds in juniper water at this moment, and her tears streamed down upon them at Frolich's kind words.

"We had better not talk about such things, dear," said she, as soon as she could speak.

"Nay, now I think it is the best thing we can do, Erica. Here, pour me this cream into the pan over the fire, and I will stir, while you strain some more whey. My back is towards you, and I cannot see you; and you can cry as you like, while I tell you all I think."

Erica found that this free leave to cry unseen was a great help towards stopping her tears, and she ceased weeping entirely while listening to all that Frolich had to say in favour of Rolf being still alive and safe. It was no great deal that could be said, only that Hund's news was more likely to be false than true, and that there was no other evidence of any accident having happened.

"My dear!" exclaimed Erica, "where is he now, then—why is he not here? O Frolich! I can hardly wonder that we are punished when I think of our presumption. When we were talking beside those graves on the day of Ulla's funeral he laughed at me for even speaking of death and separation. 'What! at our age!' he said. 'Death at our age—and separation!'—and that with Henrica's grave before our eyes!"

"Then perhaps this will prove to be a short and gentle separation to teach him to speak more humbly. There is no being in the universe that would send death to punish light, gay words spoken from a joyful heart. If there were, I and many others should have been in our

graves long since. Why, Erica! this is even a worse reason than Hund's word. Now, just tell me, Erica, would you believe anything else that Hund said?"

"In a common way, perhaps not; but you cannot think what a changed man he is, Frolich. He is so humbled, so melancholy, so awe-struck, that he is not like the same man."

"He may not be the better for that. He was more frightened than anybody at the moment the owl cried, on your betrothment-night, when you fancied that Nipen had carried off Oddo. Yet never did I see Hund more malicious than he was half-an-hour afterwards. I doubt whether any such fright would make a liar into a truthful man in a moment."

Erica now remembered and told the falsehood of Hund about what he was doing when the boat was spirited away—a falsehood told in the very midst of the humiliation and remorse she had described.

"Why, there now!" exclaimed Frolich, ceasing her stirring for a moment to look round; "what a capital story that is! and how few people know it! and how neatly you catch him in his fib! And why should not something like it be happening now with Rolf? Rolf knows all the ins and outs of the fiord, and if he has been playing bo-peep with his enemies among the islands, and frightening Hund (as he well knows how), is it not the most natural thing in the world that Hund should come scampering home and get his place, and say that he is lost, while waiting to see whether he is or not? Oh dear!" she exclaimed after a pause, during which Erica did not attempt to speak, "I know what I wish."

"You wish something kind, dear, I am sure," said Erica, with a deep sigh.

"We have so many—so very many nice, useful things—we can go up the mountains and sail away over the seas—and look far abroad into the sky—I only wish we could do one little thing more. I really think, having so many things, we might have had just one little thing more given us—and that is wings. I grudge them to yonder screaming eagles when I want them so much."

"My dear child, what strange things you say!"

"I do so very much want to fly abroad, just for once, over the fiord. If I could but look down into every nook and cove between Thor islet and the sea, I would not be long in bringing you news. If I did not see Rolf I would tell you plainly. Really, at such times, it seems very odd that we have not wings."

"Perhaps the time may come, dear."

"I can never want them so much again."

"My dear, you cannot want them as I do, if I dared to say such bold things as you do. You are not weary of the world, Frolich?"

"What! this beautiful world? Are you weary of it all, Erica?"

"Yes, dear."

"What! of the airy mountains, and the silent forests, and the lonely lakes, and the blue glaciers, with flowers fringing them! Are you quite weary of all these?"

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then would I flee away and be at rest." Erica hardly murmured these words, but Frolich caught them.

"Do you know," said she softly, after a pause, "I doubt whether we can find rest by going to any place, in this world or out of it, unless—it— The truth is, Erica, I know my father and mother think that people who are afraid of selfish and revengeful spirits, such as demons and Nipen, can never have any peace of mind. Really religious people have their way straight before them—they have only to do right, and God is their friend; and they can bear everything, and need fear nothing. But the people about us are always in a fright about some selfish being or another not being properly humoured, and so being displeased. I would not be in such bondage, Erica—no, not for the wings I was longing for just now. I should be freer if I were rooted like a tree, and without superstition, than if I had the wings of an eagle, with a belief in selfish demons."

"Let us talk of something else," said Erica, who was at the very moment considering where the mountain-demon would best like to have his Gammel cheese laid. "What is the quality of the cream, Frolich? Is it as good as it ought to be?"

"Stiorna would say that the demon will smack his lips over it. Come and taste."

"Do not speak so, dear."

"I was only quoting Stiorna——"

"What are you saying about me?" inquired Stiorna, appearing at the door. "Only talking about the cream and the cheese? Are you sure of that? Bless me! what a smell of the yellow flowers! It will be a prime cheese."

"How can you leave the cattle, Stiorna?" cried Erica. "If they are all gone when you get back——"

"Well, come then, and see the sight. I get scolded either way always. You would have scolded me finely to-night if I had not called you to see the sight."

"What sight?"

"Why, there is such a procession of boats on the fiord that you would suppose there were three weddings happening at once."

"What can we do?" exclaimed Frolich, dolefully looking at the cream, which had reached such a point that the stirring could not cease for a minute without risk of spoiling the cheese.

Erica took the long wooden spoon from Frolich's hand, and bade her run and see where the bishop (for no doubt it was the bishop) was going to land. The cream should not spoil while she was absent.

Frolich bounded away over the grass, declaring that if it was the bishop going to her father's, she could not possibly stay on the mountain for all the cheeses in Nordland. Erica remained alone, patiently stirring the cream, and hardly heeding the heat of the fire, while planning how the bishop would be told her story, and how he would examine Hund, and perhaps be able to give some news of the pirates, and certainly be ready with his advice. Some degree of hope arose within her as she thought of the esteem in which all Norway held the wisdom and kindness of the Bishop of Tronyem, and then again she felt it hard to be absent during the visit of the only person to whom she looked for comfort.

Frolich returned after a long while to defer her hopes

a little. The boats had all drawn to shore on the northern side of the fiord, where, no doubt, the bishop had a visit to pay before proceeding to Erlingsen's. The cheese-making might yet be done in time, even if Frolich should be sent for from home to see and be seen by the good bishop.

## CHAPTER XII

### PEDER ABROAD

THE day after Erica's departure to the dairy, Peder was sitting alone in his house weaving a frail basket. Sometimes he sighed to think how empty and silent the house appeared to what he had ever known it before. Ulla's wheel stood in the corner, and was now never to be heard, any more than her feeble, aged voice, which had sung ballads to the last. Erica's light, active step was gone for the present, and would it ever again be as light and active as it had been? Rolf's hearty laugh was silent, perhaps for ever. Oddo was an inmate still, but Oddo was much altered of late; and who could wonder? Though the boy was strangely unbelieving about some things, he could not but feel how wonders and misfortunes had crowded upon one another since the night of his defiance of Nipen.

From the hour of Hund's return, the boy had hardly been heard to speak. All these thoughts were too melancholy for old Peder; and, to break the silence, he began to sing as he wove his basket.

He had nearly got through a ballad of a hundred and five stanzas when he heard a footstep on the floor.

"Oddo, my boy," said he, "surely you are in early. Can it be dinner-time yet?"

"No, not this hour," replied Oddo in a low voice, which sank to a whisper as he said, "I have left Hund laying the troughs to water the meadow;[1] and if he misses me I don't care. I could not stay; I could not help coming;

[1] The strips of meadow which lie between high rocks in Norway would be parched by the reflection of the long summer sunshine, and unproductive, if the inhabitants did not use great industry in the irrigation of their lands. They conduct water from the spring heads by means of hollow trunks of trees laid end to end, through which water flows in the directions in which it is wanted, sometimes for an extent of fifty miles from one spring.

and if he kills me for telling you, he may, for tell you I must."

And Oddo went to close and fasten the door; and then he sat down on the ground, rested his arms on his grandfather's knees, and told his story in such a low tone that no "little bird" under the eaves could "carry the matter."

"O grandfather, what a mind that fellow has! He will go crazy with horror soon. I am not sure that he is not crazy now."

"He has murdered Rolf, has he?"

"I can't be sure; but the oddest thing is that he mixes up wolves with his rambling talk. Rolf can hardly have met with mischief from any wolf at this season."

"No, boy; not Rolf. But did not Hund speak of orphan children, and how wolves have been known to devour them when snow was on the ground?"

"Why, yes," said Oddo, surprised at such a guess.

"There was a reason for Hund's talking so of wolves, my dear. Tell me quick what he said of Rolf; and what made him say anything to you—to an inquisitive boy like you."

"He is like one bewitched, that cannot hold his tongue. While I was bringing the troughs, one by one, for him to lay, where the meadow was driest, he still kept muttering and muttering to himself. As often as I came within six yards of him, I heard him mutter, mutter. Then when I helped him to lay the troughs, he began to talk to me. I was not in the mind to make him many answers; but on he went, just the same as if I had asked him a hundred questions."

"It was such an opportunity for a curious boy, that I wonder you did not."

"Perhaps I might, if he had stopped long enough. But if he stopped for a moment to wipe his brows (for he was all trembling with the heat), he began again before I could well speak. He asked me whether I had ever heard that drowned men could show their heads above water, and stare with their eyes, and throw their arms about, a whole day—two days after they were drowned."

"Ay! Indeed! Did he ask that?"

"Yes, and several other things. He asked whether I

had ever heard that the islets in the fiord were so many prison-houses."

"And what did you say?"

"I wanted him to explain; so I said they were prison-houses to the eider-ducks when they were sitting, for they never stir a yard from their nests. But he did not heed a word I spoke. He went on about drowned men being kept prisoners in the islets, moaning because they can't get out. And he says they will knock, knock, as if they could cleave the thick hard rock."

"What do you think of all this, my boy?"

"Why, when I said I had not heard a word of any such thing, even from my grandmother or Erica, he declared he had heard the moans himself—moaning and crying; but then he mixed up something about the barking of wolves that made confusion in the story. Though he had been hot just before, there he stood shivering, as if it was winter, as he stood in the broiling sun. Then I asked him if he had seen dead men swim and stare, as he said he had heard them moan and cry."

"And what did he say then?"

"He started bolt upright, as if I had been picking his pocket. He was in a passion for a minute, I know, if ever he was in his life. Then he tried to laugh as he said what a lot of new stories—stories of spirits, such stories as people love—he should have to carry home to the north, whenever he went back to his own place."

"In the north, his own place in the north! He wanted to mislead you there, boy. Hund was born some way to the south."

"No, was he really? How is one to believe a word he says, except when he speaks as if he was in his sleep, straight out from his conscience, I suppose? He began to talk about the bishop next, wanting to know when I thought he would come, and whether he was apt to hold private talk with every sort of person at the houses he stayed at."

"How did you answer him? You know nothing about the bishop's visits."

"So I told him; but, to try him, I said I knew one thing, that a quantity of fresh fish would be wanted when

the bishop comes with his train, and I asked him whether he would go fishing with me as soon as we should hear that the bishop was drawing near."

"He would not agree to that, I fancy."

"He asked how far out I thought of going. Of course I said to Vogel islet—at least as far as Vogel islet. Do you know, grandfather, I thought he would have knocked me down at the word. He muttered something, I could not hear what, to get off. By that time we were laying the last trough. I asked him to go for some more; and the minute he was out of sight I scampered here. Now, what sort of a mind do you think this fellow has?"

"Not an easy one, it is plain. It is too clear also that he thinks Rolf is drowned."

"But do you think so, grandfather?"

"Do you think so, grandson?"

"Not a bit of it. Depend upon it, Rolf is all alive, if he is swimming and staring, and throwing his arms about in the water. I think I see him now. And I will see him, if he is to be seen alive or dead."

"And pray, how?"

"I ought to have said, if you will help me. You say sometimes, grandfather, that you can pull a good stroke with the oar still, and I can steer as well as our master himself; and the fiord never was stiller than it is to-day. Think what it would be to bring home Rolf, or some good news of him! We would have a race up to the seater afterwards to see who could be the first to tell Erica."

"Gently, gently, boy! What is Rolf about not to come home, if he is alive?"

"That we shall learn from him. Did you hear that he told Erica he should go as far as Vogel islet, dropping something about being safe there from pirates and everything?"

Peder really thought there was something in this. He sent off Oddo to his work in the little meadow, and himself sought out Madame Erlingsen, who, having less belief in spirits and enchantments than Peder, was in proportion more struck with the necessity of seeing whether there was any meaning in Hund's revelations, lest Rolf should be perishing for want of help. The story of his disappear-

ance had spread through the whole region; and there was not a fisherman on the fiord who had not, by this time, given an opinion as to how he was drowned. But madame was well aware that, if he were only wrecked, there was no sign that he could make that would not terrify the superstitious minds of the neighbours, and make them keep aloof, instead of helping him. In addition to all this, it was doubtful whether his signals would be seen by anybody, at a season when every one who could be spared was gone up to the dairies.

As soon as Hund was gone out after dinner, the old man and his grandson put off in the boat, carrying a note from Madame Erlingsen to her neighbours along the fiord, requesting the assistance of one or two rowers on an occasion which might prove one of life and death. The neighbours were obliging. The Holbergs sent a stout farm-servant with directions to call at a cousin's, lower down, for a boatman; so that the boat was soon in fast career down the fiord, Oddo full of expectation, and of pride in commanding such an expedition, and Peder being relieved from all necessity of rowing more than he liked.

Oddo had found occasionally the truth of a common proverb—he had easily brought his master's horses to the water, but could not make them drink. He now found that he had easily got rowers into the boat, but that it was impossible to make them row beyond a certain point. He had used as much discretion as Peder himself about not revealing the precise place of their destination; and when Vogel islet came in sight, the two helpers at once gave him hints to steer so as to keep as near the shore and as far from the island as possible. Oddo gravely steered for the island notwithstanding. When the men saw that this was his resolution they shipped their oars, and refused to strike another stroke, unless one of them might steer. That island had a bad reputation, it was bewitched or haunted; and in that direction the men would not go. They were willing to do all they could to oblige; they would row twenty miles without resting with pleasure; but they would not brave Nipen, nor any other demon, for any consideration.

"How far off is it, Oddo?" asked Peder.

"Two miles, grandfather. Can you and I manage it by ourselves, think you?"

"Ay, surely; if we can land these friends of ours. They will wait ashore till we call for them again."

"I will leave you my supper, if you will wait for us here, on this headland," said Oddo to the men.

The men could make no other objection than that they were certain the boat would never return. They were very civil — would not accept Oddo's supper on any account—would remain on the watch—wished their friends would be persuaded; and, when they found all persuasion in vain, declared they would bear testimony to Erica, and as long as they should live, to the bravery of the old man and boy who thus threw away their lives in search of a comrade who had fallen a victim to Nipen.

Amidst these friendly words, the old man and his grandson put off once more alone, making straight for the islet. Of the two Peder was the greater hero, for he saw the most ground for fear.

"Promise me, Oddo," said he, "not to take advantage of my not seeing. As sure as you observe anything strange, tell me exactly what you see."

"I will, grandfather. There is nothing yet but what is so beautiful that I could not for the life of me find out anything to be afraid of. The water is as green as our best pasture, as it washes up against the grey rock. And that grey rock is all crested and tufted with green again, wherever a bush can spring. It is all alive with sea-birds, as white as snow, as they wheel above it in the sun."

"'Tis the very place," said Peder, putting new strength into his old arm. Odo rowed stoutly too for some way, and then he stopped to ask on what side the remains of a birch ladder used to hang down, as Peder had often told him.

"On the north side, but there is no use in looking for that, my boy. That birch ladder must have rotted away with frost and wet long and long ago."

"It is likely," said Oddo, "but, thinking that some man must have put it there, I should like to see whether it really is impossible for one with a strong hand and light foot to mount this wall. I brought our longest boat-

hook on purpose to try. Where a ladder hung before, a foot must have climbed; and if I mount, Rolf may have mounted before me."

It chilled Peder's heart to remember the aspect of the precipice which his boy talked of climbing; but he said nothing, feeling that it would be in vain. This forbearance touched Oddo's feelings.

"I will run into no folly, trust me," said he. "I do not forget that you depend on me for getting home, and that the truth about Nipen and such things depends for an age to come on our being seen at home again safe. But I have a pretty clear notion that Rolf is somewhere on the top there."

"Suppose you call him, then."

Oddo had much rather catch him. He pictured to himself the pride and pleasure of mastering the ascent, the delight of surprising Rolf asleep in his solitude, and the fun of standing over him to waken him, and witness his surprise. He could not give up the attempt to scale the rock, but he would do it very cautiously.

Slowly and watchfully they passed round the islet, Oddo seeking with his eye any ledge of the rock on which he might mount. Pulling off his shoes that his bare feet might have the better hold, and stripping off almost all his clothes, for lightness in climbing and perhaps swimming, he clambered up to more than one promising spot, and then, finding that further progress was impossible, had to come down again. At last, seeing a narrow chasm filled with leafy shrubs, he determined to try how high he could reach by means of these. He swung himself up by means of a bush which grew downwards, having its roots firmly fixed in a crevice of the rock. This gave him hold of another, which brought him in reach of a third, so that, making his way like a squirrel or a monkey, he found himself hanging at such a height that it seemed easier to go on than to turn back. For some time after leaving his grandfather he had spoken to him, as an assurance of his safety. When too far off to speak, he had sung aloud, to save the old man from fears; and now that he did not feel at all sure whether he should ever get up or down, he began to whistle cheerily. He was pleased to hear it

AT THE END OF A LEDGE HE FOUND THE REMAINS OF A LADDER MADE OF BIRCH-POLES

answered from the boat. The thought of the old man sitting there alone, and his return wholly depending upon the safety of his companion, animated Oddo afresh to find a way up the rock. It looked to him as like a wall as any other rock about the islet. There was no footing where he was looking, that was certain. So he advanced farther into the chasm, where the rocks so nearly met that a giant's arm might have touched the opposite wall. Here there was promise of release from his dangerous situation. At the end of a ledge he saw something like poles hanging on the rock—some work of human hands, certainly. Having scrambled towards them, he found the remains of a ladder made of birch poles fastened together with thongs of leather. This ladder had once, no doubt, hung from top to bottom of the chasm, and its lower part, now gone, was that ladder of which Peder had often spoken as a proof that men had been on the island.

With a careful hand Oddo pulled at the ladder, and it did not give way. He tugged harder, and still it only shook. He must try it; there was nothing else to be done. It was well for him now that he was used to dangerous climbing—that he had had adventures on the slippery, cracked glaciers of Sulitelma—and that being on a height, with precipices below, was no new situation to him. He climbed, trusting as little as possible to the ladder, setting his foot in preference on any projection of the rock, or any root of the smallest shrub. More than one pole cracked, more than one fastening gave way, when he had barely time to shift his weight upon a better support. He heard his grandfather's voice calling, and he could not answer. It disturbed him, now that his joints were strained, his limbs trembling, and his mouth parched so that his breath rattled as it came.

He reached the top, however. He sprang from the edge of the precipice, unable to look down, threw himself on his face, and panted and trembled, as if he had never before climbed anything less safe than a staircase. Never before, indeed, had he done anything like this. The feat was performed—the islet was not to him inaccessible. This thought gave him strength. He sprang to his feet again, and whistled loud and shrill. He could imagine

the comfort this must be to Peder; and he whistled more and more merrily till he found himself rested enough to proceed on his search for Rolf. He went briskly on his way, not troubling himself with any thoughts of how he was to get down again.

Never had he seen a place so full of water-birds and their nests. Their nests strewed all the ground, and they themselves were strutting and waddling, fluttering and vociferating, in every direction. They were perfectly tame, knowing nothing of men, and having had no experience of disturbance. The ducks that were leading their broods allowed Oddo to stroke their feathers, and the drakes looked on, without taking any offence.

"If Rolf is here," thought Oddo, "he has been living on most amiable terms with his neighbours."

After an anxious thought or two of Nipen—after a glance or two round the sky and shores for a sign of wind—Oddo began in earnest his quest of Rolf. He called his name gently, then louder.

There was some kind of answer. Some sound of human voice he heard, he was certain; but so muffled, so dull, that whence it came he could not tell. It might even be his grandfather calling from below. So he crossed to quite the verge of the little island, wishing with all his heart that the birds would be quiet, and cease their civility of all answering when he spoke. When quite out of hearing of Peder, Oddo called again, with scarcely a hope of any result, so plain was it to his eyes that no one resided on the island. On its small summit there was really no intermission of birds' nests—no space where any one had lain down—no sign of habitation, no vestige of food, dress, or utensils. With a saddened heart, therefore, Oddo called again, and again he was sure there was an answer, though whence and what he could not make out.

He then sang a part of a chant that he had learnt by Rolf singing it as he sat carving his share of the new pulpit. He stopped in the middle, and presently believed that he heard the air continued, though the voice seemed so indistinct, and the music so much as if it came from underground, that Oddo began to recall, with some doubt and fear, the stories of the enchantment of the place. It was

not long before he heard a cry from the water below. Looking over the precipice, he saw what made him draw back in terror: he saw the very thing Hund had described —the swimming and staring head of Rolf, and the arms thrown up in the air. Not having Hund's conscience, however, and having much more curiosity, he looked again, and then a third time.

"Are you Rolf, really?" asked he at last.

"Yes, but who are you—Oddo or the demon—up there where nobody can climb? Who are you?"

"I will show you. We will find each other out," thought Oddo, with a determination to take the leap and ascertain the truth.

He leaped, and struck the water at a sufficient distance from Rolf. When he came up again, they approached each other, staring, and each with some doubt as to whether the other was human or a demon.

"Are you really alive, Rolf?" said the one.

"To be sure I am, Oddo," said the other; "but what demon carried you to the top of that rock, that no man ever climbed?"

Oddo looked mysterious, suddenly resolving to keep his secret for the present.

"Not that way," said Rolf. "I have not the strength I had, and I can't swim round the place now. I was just resting myself when I heard you call, and came out to see. Follow me home."

He turned and began to swim homewards. Oddo had the strongest inclination to go with him, to see what would be revealed, but there were two objections. His grandfather must be growing anxious, and he was not perfectly sure yet whether his guide might not be Nipen in Rolf's likeness about to lead him to some hidden prison.

"Give me your hand, Rolf," said the boy bravely.

It is a real, substantial, warm hand.

"I don't wonder you doubt," said Rolf; "I can't look much like myself—unshaven, and shrunk, and haggard as my face must be."

Oddo was now quite satisfied; and he told of the boat and his grandfather. The boat was scarcely farther off than the cave, and poor Rolf was almost in extremity for

drink. The water and brandy he brought with him had been finished nearly two days, and he was suffering extremely from thirst. He thought he could reach the boat, and Oddo led the way, bidding him not mind his being without clothes till they could find him some.

Glad was the old man to hear his boy's call from the water; and his face lighted up with wonder and pleasure when he heard that Rolf was not far behind. He lent a hand to help him into the boat, and asked no questions till he had given him food and drink. He reproached himself for having brought neither camphor nor assafœtida, to administer with the corn-brandy. Here was the brandy, however, and some water, and fish, and bread, and cloud-berries. Great was the amazement of Peder and Oddo at Rolf's pushing aside the brandy, and seizing the water. When he had drained the last drop, he even preferred the cloud-berries to the brandy. A transient doubt thence occurred, whether this was Rolf after all. Rolf saw it in their faces, and laughed; and when they had heard his story of what he had suffered from thirst, they were quite satisfied, and wondered no longer.

He was all impatience to be gone. It tried him more now to think how long it would be before Erica could hear of his preservation than to bear all that had gone before. Being without clothes, however, it was necessary to visit the cave, and bring away what was there. In truth, Oddo was not sorry for this. His curiosity about the cave was so great that he felt it impossible to go home without seeing it; and the advantage of holding the secret knowledge of such a place was one which he would not give up. He seized an oar, gave another to Rolf; and they were presently off the mouth of the cave. Peder sighed at their having to leave him again; but he believed what Rolf said of there being no danger, and of their remaining close at hand. One or the other came popping up beside the boat every minute, with clothes, or net, or lines, or brandy-flask, and finally with the oars of the poor broken skiff, being obliged to leave the skiff itself behind. Rolf did not forget to bring away whole handsful of beautiful shells, which he had amused himself with collecting for Erica.

At last they entered the boat again; and while they were dressing, Oddo charmed his grandfather with a description of the cave—of the dark, sounding walls, the lofty roof, and the green tide breaking on the white sands. It almost made the listener cool to hear of these things; but, as Oddo had remarked, the heat had abated. It was near midnight, and the sun was going to set. Their row to the shore would be in the cool twilight; and then they should take in companions, who, fresh from rest, would save them the trouble of rowing home.

When all were too tired to talk, and the oars were dipping somewhat lazily, and the breeze had died away, and the sea-birds were quiet, old Peder, who appeared to his companions to be asleep, raised his head, and said—

"I heard a sob. Are you crying, Oddo?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"What is your grief, my boy?"

"No grief, anything but grief now. I have felt more grief than you know of, though, or anybody. I did not know it fully myself till now."

"Right, my boy; and right to say it out too."

"I don't care now who knows how miserable I have been. I did not believe, all the time, that Nipen had anything to do with these misfortunes——"

"Right, Oddo!" exclaimed Rolf now.

"But I was not quite certain; and how could I say a word against it when I was the one to provoke Nipen? Now Rolf is safe, and Erica will be happy again, and I shall not feel as if everybody's eyes were upon me, and know that it is only out of kindness that they do not reproach me as having done all the mischief. I shall hold up my head again now—as some may think I have done all along; but I did not, in my own eyes—no, not in my own eyes, for all these weary days that are gone."

"Well, they are gone now," said Rolf. "Let them go by and be forgotten."

"Nay, not forgotten," said Peder, "How is my boy to learn if he forgets——"

"Don't fear that for me, grandfather," said Oddo, as the tears still streamed down his face. "No fear of that. I shall not forget these last days;—no, not as long as I live."

## CHAPTER XIII

### PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

THE comrades who were waiting and watching on the point were duly amazed to see three heads in the boat, on her return; and duly delighted to find that the third was Rolf—alive and no ghost. They asked question upon question, and Rolf answered some fully and truly, while he showed reserve upon others; and at last, when closely pressed, he declared himself too much exhausted to talk, and begged permission to lie down in the bottom of the boat and sleep. Upon this a long silence ensued. It lasted till the farmhouse was in sight at which one of the rowers was to be landed. Oddo then exclaimed—

"I wonder what we all have been thinking about. We have not settled a single thing about what is to be said and done; and here we are almost in sight of home, and Hund's cunning eyes."

"I have settled all about it," replied Rolf, raising himself up from the bottom of the boat, where they all thought he had been sleeping soundly. "My mind," said he, "is quite clear. The first thing I have decided upon is that I may rely on the honour of our friends here. You have proved your kindness, friends, in coming on this expedition, but for which I should have died in my hole, like a superannuated bear in its den. This is a story that the whole country will hear of; and our grandchildren will tell it, on winter nights, when there is talk of the war that brought the pirates on our coasts. Your names will go abroad with the story, comrades, and, on one condition, with high honour; and that condition is, that you say not a word beyond the family you live in, for the next few days, of the adventure of this night, or of your having seen me. More depends on this than you know of now; more than I will tell, this day, to any person but my master. My good old friend there will help me to a meeting with my

master, without asking a question as to what I have to say to him. Will you not, Peder?"

"Surely. I have no doubt you are right," replied Peder.

The neighbours were rather sorry; but they could not object. They smiled at Oddo, and nodded encouragement when he implored Rolf to fix a time when everything might be known, and to answer just this and just that little inquiry.

"Oddo," said his grandfather, "be a man among us men. Show that your honour is more to you than your curiosity."

"Thank you, grandfather, I will. I will ask only one more question; and that Rolf will thank me for. Had we not better fix some place, far away from Hund's eyes and thoughts, for my master and Rolf to have their talk; and then I will guide my master——"

"Guide your master," cried Rolf, laughing, "when your master knew every rock and every track in the country years enough before you were born!"

"You did not let me finish," said Oddo. "You may want a messenger—he or you—and *I* know every track in the country; and there is no one swifter of foot or that can keep counsel better."

"That is true, Rolf," said Peder. "If the boy is too curious to know everything, it is not for the sake of telling it again. If you should happen to want a messenger, it may be worth attending to what he says."

"I have no objection to add that to my plan, if Erlingsen pleases," said Rolf. "I must see Erlingsen; but there is another person that I must make haste to see—that I would fly to, if I could. What I wish is, that my master would meet me on the road to where she is; supposing Hund to remain at home."

He was told that there was no fear of Hund's roving while the bishop was daily expected. Rolf having been out of the way, the whole story of the journey of the Bishop of Tronyem had to be told him. It made him thoughtful; and he dropped a word or two of satisfaction, as if it had thrown new light upon what he was thinking of.

"All this," said he, "only makes me wish the more to see Erlingsen immediately. I should say the best way will be for you to set me ashore some way short of home, and ask Erlingsen to meet me at the Black Tarn. There cannot be a quieter place; and I shall be so far on my way to the seater."

"If you will just make a looking-glass of the Black Tarn," said Oddo, "you will see that you have no business to carry such a face as yours to the seater. Erica will die of terror at you for the mountain-demon, before you can persuade her it is only you."

"I was thinking," observed one of the rowers, who relished the idea of going down to posterity in a wonderful story, "I was just thinking that your wisest way will be to take a rest in my bed at Holberg's, without anybody knowing, and shave yourself with my razor, and dress in my Sunday clothes, and so show yourself to your betrothed in such a trim as that she will be glad to see you."

"Do so, Rolf," urged Peder. Everybody said "do so," and agreed that Erica would suffer far less by remaining five or six hours longer in her present state of mind, than by seeing her lover look like a ghastly savage, or perhaps hearing that he was lying by the roadside, dying of his exertions to reach her. Rolf tried to laugh at all this; but he could not contradict it. He would not hear a word of any messenger being sent. He declared that it would only torment her, as she would not believe in his return till she saw him; and he dropped something about everybody being so wanted at home that nobody ought to stray.

All took place as it was settled in the boat. Before the people on Holberg's farm had come in to breakfast, Rolf was snug in bed, with a large pitcher of whey by the bedside, to quench his still insatiable thirst. No one but the Holbergs knew of his being there; and he got away unseen in the afternoon, rested, shaven, and dressed, so as to look more like himself, though still haggard. Packing his old clothes into a bundle, which he carried with a stick over his shoulder, and laden with nothing else but a few rye-cakes and a flask of the everlasting corn-brandy,

he set forth, thanking his hosts very heartily for their care, and somewhat mysteriously assuring them that they would hear something soon, and that meantime they had better not have to be sought far from home.

As he expected, he met no one whom he knew. Nine-tenths of the neighbours were far away on the seaters; and of the small remainder, almost all were attending the bishop on the opposite shore of the lake. Rolf shook his head at every deserted farmhouse that he passed, thinking how the pirates might ransack the dwellings if they should happen to discover that few inhabitants remained in them but those whose limbs were too old to climb the mountain. He shook his head again when he thought what consternation he might spread through these dwellings by dropping at the doors the news of how near the pirate schooner lay. It seemed to be out of the people's minds now, because it was out of sight, and the bishop had become visible instead. As for the security which some talked of from there being so little worth taking in the Nordland farmhouses—this might be true if only one house was to be attacked, and that one defended; but half-a-dozen ruffians, coming ashore to search eight or ten undefended houses in a day, might gather enough booty to pay them for their trouble. Of money they would find little or none; but in some families there were gold chains, crosses, and earrings, which had come down from a remote generation; or silver goblets and tankards. There were goats worth carrying away for their milk, and spirited horses and their harness to sell at a distance. There were stores of the finest bed and table linen in the world, sacks of flour, cellars full of ale, kegs of brandy, and a mass of tobacco in every house. Fervently did Rolf wish, as he passed by these comfortable dwellings, that the enemy would cast no eye or thought upon their comforts till he should have given such information in the proper quarters as should deprive them of the power of doing mischief in this neighbourhood.

Leaving the last of the farmhouses behind, he ascended the ravine, and came out upon the expanse of rich herbage which Erica had trodden but a few days before. He thought, as she had done, of his own description of their

journeying together to the seater, and of the delight with which she would leap from the cart to walk with him, on the first sight of the waving grass upon the upland. His heart beat joyously at the thought, instead of mourning like hers. He was transported with happiness when he thought how near he was to her now, and on the eve of a season of delight—a few balmy summer weeks upon the pastures, to be followed by his marriage. This affair of the pirates once finished, was ever man so happy as he was going to be? The thought made him spring as lightly through the tall grass that lay between him and the Black Tarn as the reindeer from point to point of the mountain steep.

The breeze blew in his face, refreshing him with its coolness, and with the fragrance of the birch, with which it was loaded. But it brought something else—a transient sound which surprised Rolf—voices of men, who seemed, if he could judge from so rapid a hint, to be talking angrily. He began to consider whom, besides Oddo, Erlingsen could have thought it safe or necessary to bring with him, or whether it was somebody met with by chance. At all events, it would be wisest not to show himself, and to approach with all possible caution. Cautiously, therefore, he drew near, keeping a vigilant watch all around, and ready to pop down into the grass on any alarm. Being unable to see any one near the tarn, he was convinced the talkers must be seated under the crags on its margin; and he therefore made a circuit to get behind the rocks, and then climbed a huge fragment, which seemed to have been toppled down from some steep, and to have rolled to the brink of the water. Two stunted pines grew out from the summit of this crag; and between these pines Rolf placed himself, and looked down from thence.

Two men sat on the ground in the shadow of the rock. One was Hund, and the other must undoubtedly be one of the pirate crew. His dress, arms, and broken language all showed him to be so; and it was, in fact, the same man that Erica had met near the same place, though that she had had such an adventure was the last thing her lover dreamed of as he surveyed the man's figure from above.

This man appeared surly. Hund was extremely agitated.

"It is very hard," said he, "when all I want is to do no harm to anybody—neither to my old friends nor my new acquaintances—that I cannot be let alone. I have done too much mischief in my life already. The demons have made sport of me. It is their sport that I have as many lives to answer for as any man of twice my age in Nordland; and now that I would be harmless for the rest of my days——"

"Don't trouble yourself to talk about your days," interrupted the pirate, "they will be too few to be worth speaking of, if you do not put yourself under our orders again. You are a deserter—and as a deserter you go back with me, unless you choose to go as a comrade."

"And what might I expect that your orders would be, if I went with you?"

"You know very well that we want you for a guide. That is all you are worth. In a fight, you would only be in the way—unless indeed you could contrive to get out of the way."

"Then you would not expect me to fight against my master and his people?"

"Nobody was ever so foolish as to expect you to fight, more or less, I should think. No, your business would be to pilot us to Erlingsen's, and answer truly all our questions about their ways and doings."

"Surprise them in their sleep!" muttered Hund. "Wake them up with the light of their own burning roofs! And they would know me by that light! They would point me out to the bishop;—they would find time in their hurry to mark me for the monster they might well think me!"

"Yes; you would be in the front, of course," observed the pirate. "But there is one comfort for you—if you are so earnest to see the bishop, as you told me you were, my plan is the best. When once we lock him down on board our schooner, you can have him all to yourself. You can confess your sins to him the whole day long; for nobody else will want a word with either of you. You

can show him your enchanted island, down in the fiord, and see if he can lay the ghost for you."

Hund sprang to his feet in an agony of passion. The well-armed pirate was up as soon as he. Rolf drew back two paces, to be out of sight, if by chance they should look up, and armed himself with a heavy stone. He heard the pirate say—

"You can try to run away, if you like; I shall shoot you through the head before you have gone five yards. And you may refuse to return with me; and then I shall know how to report of you to my captain. I shall tell him that you are lying at the bottom of this lake—if it has a bottom—with a stone tied round your neck, like a drowned wild cat. I hope you may chance to find your enemy there, to make the place the pleasanter."

Rolf could not resist the impulse to send his heavy stone into the middle of the tarn, to see the effect upon the men below. He gave a good cast, on the very instant; and prodigious was the splash, as the stone hit the water, precisely in the middle of the little lake. The men did not see the cause of the commotion that followed; but, starting and turning at the splash, they saw the rings spreading in the dark waters which had lain as still as the heavens but a moment before. How could two guilty, superstitious men doubt that the waters were thrown into agitation by the pirate's last words? Yet they glanced fearfully round the whole landscape, far and near. They saw no living thing but a hawk which, startled from its perch on a scathed pine, was wheeling round in the air in an unsteady flight. The pirate pointed to the bird with one hand, while he laid the other on the pistol in his belt.

"Yes," said Hund, trembling, "the bird saw it. Did you see it?"

"See what?"

"The water-sprite, Uldra. Before you throw me in to the water-sprite, we will see which is the strongest."

And in desperation Hund, unarmed as he was, threw himself upon the pirate, sprang at his throat, and both wrestled with all their force. Rolf could not but look; and he saw that the pirate had drawn forth his pistol,

IN DESPERATION HUND, UNARMED AS HE WAS, THREW HIMSELF UPON THE PIRATE

and that all would be over with Hund in a moment if he did not interfere. He stood forward between the two pine stems, on the ridge of the rock, and uttered very loud the mournful cry which had so terrified his enemies at Vogel islet. The combatants flew asunder, as if parted by a flash of lightning. Both looked up to the point whence the sound had come; and there they saw what they supposed to be Rolf's spectre, pointing at them, and the eyes staring as when looking up from the waters of the fiord. How could these guilty and superstitious men doubt that it was Rolf's spectre which, rising through the centre of the tarn, had caused the late commotion in its waters? Away they fled—at first in different directions; but it amused Rolf to observe that, rather than be alone, Hund turned to follow the track of the tyrant who had just been threatening and insulting him, and driving him to struggle for his life.

"Ay," thought Rolf, "it is his conscience that makes me so much more terrible to him than that ruffian. I never hurt a hair of his head; and yet, through his conscience, my face is worse than the blasting lightning to his eyes. When will all the people hereabouts find out, as my mistress said when I was a boy—(apt, as boys are, to remember the wise things that such a gentle mistress says)—when will people find out that the demons and sprites they live in fear of all come out of their own heads and hearts? Here, in Hund's case, is guilt shaping out visions whichever way he turns. Not one of his ghost-stories is there, for months past, but I am at the bottom of; and that only through his consciousness of hating and wanting to injure me. Then, in the opposite case—of one as innocent as the whitest flower in all this pasture—in my Erica's case—the ghosts she sees are all from passions that leave her heart pure, but bewilder her eyes. It is the fear that she was early made subject to, and the grief that she feels for her mother, that create demons and sprites for her. The day may come, if I can make her happy enough, when I may convince her that, for all she now thinks, she never yet saw a token of any evil spirit—of any spirit but the Good One that rules all things. What a sigh she will give, what a free

breathing hers will be, the day when I can show her, as plainly as I see myself, that it is nothing but her own fears and griefs that have crossed her path, and she never doubting that they were demons and sprites! Heigh-ho! Where is Erlingsen? It is nothing short of cruel to keep me waiting to-day, of all days; and in this spot, of all places—almost within sight of the seater where my poor Erica sits pining, and seeing nothing of the pastures, but only, with her mind's eye, the sea-caves where she thinks these limbs are stretched, cold and helpless, as in a grave. A pretty story I shall have to tell her, if she will only believe it, of another sort of sea-cave."

To pass the time he took out the shells he had collected for Erica, and admired them afresh, and planned where she would place them, so as best to adorn their sitting-room, when they were married. Erlingsen arrived before he had been thus engaged five minutes; and indeed before he had been more than a quarter of an hour altogether at the place of meeting.

"My dear master!" exclaimed Rolf, on seeing him coming, "have pity on Erica and me, and hear what I have to tell you, that I may be gone."

"You shall be gone at once, my good fellow! I will walk with you, and you shall tell your story as we go."

Rolf shook his head, and objected that he could not, in conscience, take Erlingsen a step further from home than was necessary, as he was only too much wanted there.

"Is that Oddo yonder?" he asked. "He said you would bring him."

"Yes; he has grown trustworthy of late. We have had fewer heads and hands among us than the times require since Peder grew old and blind, and you were missing, and Hund had to be watched instead of trusted. So we have been obliged to make a man of Oddo, though he has the years of a boy, and the curiosity of a woman. I brought him now, thinking that a messenger might be wanted to raise the country against the pirates; and I believe Oddo, in his present mood, will be as sure as we know he can be swift."

"It is well we have a messenger. Where is the bishop?"

"Just going to his boat, at this moment, I doubt not,"

replied Erlingsen, measuring with his eye the length of the shadows. "The bishop is to sup with us this evening."

"And how long to stay?"

"Over to-morrow night, at the least. If many of the neighbours should bring their business to him, it may be longer. My little Frolich will be vexed that he should come while she is absent. Indeed I should not much wonder if she sets out homeward when she hears the news you will carry, so that we shall see her at breakfast."

"It is more likely," observed Rolf, "that we shall see the bishop up the mountain at breakfast. Ah! you stare; but you will find I am not out of my wits when you hear what has come to my knowledge since we parted, and especially within this hour."

Erlingsen was indeed presently convinced that it was the intention of the pirates to carry off the Bishop of Tronyem, in order that his ransom might make up to them for the poverty of the coasts. He heard besides such an ample detail of the plundering practices which Rolf had witnessed from his retreat as convinced him that the strangers, though in great force, must be prevented by a vigorous effort from doing further mischief. The first thing to be done was to place the bishop in safety on the mountain; and the next was so to raise the country as that these pirates should be certainly taken when they should come within reach.

Oddo was called, and entrusted with the information which had to be conveyed to the magistrate at Saltdalen. He carried his master's tobacco-pouch as a token—this pouch, of Lapland make, being well known to the magistrate as Erlingsen's. Oddo was to tell him of the danger of the bishop, and to request him to send to the spot whatever force could be mustered at Saltdalen; and moreover to issue the budstick [1] to raise the country. The pirates

[1] When it is desired to send a summons or other message over a district in Norway where the dwellings are scattered, the budstick is send round by running messengers. It is a stick made hollow to hold the magistrate's order, and a screw at one end to secure the paper in its place. Each messenger runs a certain distance, and then delivers it to another, who must carry it forward. If any one is absent, the budstick must be laid upon the "housefather's great chair, by the fireside;" and if the house is locked, it must

having once entered the upper reach of the fiord, might thus be prevented from ever going back again, and from annoying any more the neighbourhood which they had so long infested.

Erlingsen promised to be wary on his return homewards, so as not to fall in with the two whom Rolf had put to flight. He said, however, that if by chance he should cross their path, he did not doubt he could also make them run, by acting the ghost or demon, though he had not had Rolf's advantage of disappearing in the fiord before their eyes. They were already terrified enough to fly from anything that called itself a ghost.

The three then went on their several ways—Oddo speeding over the ridges like a sprite on a night errand, and Rolf striding up the grassy slopes like (what he was) a lover anxious to be beside his betrothed after a perilous absence.

be fastened outside the door, so as to be seen as soon as the host returns. Upon great occasions, it was formerly found that a whole region could be raised in a very short time. The method is still in use for appointments on public business.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MIDNIGHT

This was the day when the first cheese of the season was found to be perfect and complete. Frolich, Stiorna, and Erica examined it carefully, and pronounced it a well-pressed, excellent Gammel cheese, such as they should not be ashamed to set before the bishop, and therefore one which ought to satisfy the demon. It now only remained to carry it to its destination—to the ridge where the first cheese of the season was always laid for the demon, and where, it appeared, he regularly came for his offering, as no vestige of the gift was ever to be found the next morning—only the round place in the grass where it had lain, and the marks of some feet which had trodden the herbage.

"Help me up with it upon my head, Stiorna," said Erica. "If Frolich looks at it any longer, she will grudge such a cheese going where it ought. Is not that the thought that is in your mind at this moment, Frolich, dear?"

"No. I do not grudge it," replied Frolich. "My mother says it is right freely to give whatever the feelings of those who help us require."

"And you do thus freely give—my mistress and all who belong to her—without a sign of grudging," declared Erica. "But would you not be better pleased if the gift required was a bunch of moss-flowers, or a basket of cloudberries?"

"Perhaps so; yet, no—I think not. Our good cheeses are not wasted. They do not lie and rot in the sun and the mists. Somebody has the benefit of them, whether it be the demon or not."

"Who else should it be?" asked Stiorna. "There is not a man, woman, or child, on any seater in Sulitelma, who would touch a cheese laid out for the mountain-demon."

"Perhaps not. I never watched to see what happens when the Gammel cheese is left alone. I only say I do not grudge our cheese, as somebody has it. I will carry it myself, in token of goodwill, if you will let me, Erica. Here—shift it upon my head."

Erica would not hear of this, and began to walk away with her load, begging Stiorna to watch the cattle—not once to take her eye off them till she should return to assume her watch for the night hours.

"I know why you will not let me carry the cheese," said Frolich, smiling. "You are thinking of Oddo with the cake and ale. Nobody but you must deposit offerings henceforward. You are afraid I should eat up that cheese almost as heavy as myself. You think there would not be a paring left for the demon by the time I got to the ridge."

"Not so," replied Erica. "I think that he to whom this cheese is destined had rather be served by one who does not laugh at him. And it is a safer plan for you, Frolich."

And off went Erica with her cheese.

The ridge on which she laid it would have tempted her at any other time to sit down. It was green and soft with mosses, and offered as comfortable a couch to one tired with the labours of the day as any to be found at the farm. But to-night it was to be haunted; so Erica merely stayed to do her duty. She selected the softest tuft of moss on which to lay the cheese, put her offering reverently down, and then diligently gathered the brightest blossoms from the herbage around, and strewed them over the cheese. She then walked rapidly homewards, without once looking behind her. If she had had the curiosity and courage to watch for a little while, she would have seen her offering carried off by an odd little figure, with nothing very terrible in its appearance—namely, a woman about four feet high, with a flat face, and eyes wide apart, wearing a reindeer garment like a waggoner's frock, a red comforter about her neck, a red cloth cap on her head, a blue worsted sash, and leather boots up to the knee—in short, such a Lapland girl as Erica would have given a rye-cake to as charity, but would not have thought of asking to sit

down even in her master's kitchen; for the Norwegian servants are very high and saucy towards the Lapps who wander to their doors. It is not surprising that the Lapps, who pitch their tents on the mountain, should like having a fins Gammel cheese for the trouble of picking it up; and the company whose tents Erica had passed on her way up to the seater, kept a good look-out upon all the dairy people round, and carried off every cheese meant for the demon. While Erica was gathering and strewing the blossoms, this girl was hidden near; and trusting to Erica's not looking behind her, the rogue swept off the blossoms, and threw them at her before she had gone ten yards, trundled the cheese down the other side of the ridge, made a circuit, and was at the tents with her prize before supper-time. What would Erica have thought if she had beheld this fruit of so many milkings and skimmings, so much boiling and pressing, devoured by greedy Lapps in their dirty tent?

On her way homewards Erica remembered that this was Midsummer Eve—a season when her mother was in her thoughts more than at any other time; for Midsummer Eve is sacred in Norway to the wood-demon, whose victim she believed her mother to have been. Every woodman sticks his axe into a tree that night, that the demon may, if he pleases, begin the work of the year by felling trees or making a faggot. Erica hastened to the seater, to discover whether Erlingsen had left his axe behind, and whether Jan had one with him.

Jan had an axe, and remembering his duty, though tired and sleepy, was just going to the nearest pine-grove with it when Erica reached home. She seized Erlingsen's axe and went also, and stuck it in a tree, just within the verge of the grove, which was in that part a thicket, from the growth of underwood. This thicket was so near the back of the dairy that the two were home in five minutes. Yet they found Frolich almost as impatient as if they had been gone an hour. She asked whether their heathen worship was done at last, so that all might go to bed; or whether they were to be kept awake till midnight by more mummery?

Erica replied by showing that Jan was already gone to

his loft over the shed, and begging leave to comb and curl Frolich's hair,[1] and see her to rest at once. Stiorna was asleep; and Erica herself meant to watch the cattle this night. They lay couched in the grass, all near each other, and within view, in the mild slanting sunshine; and here she intended to sit, on the bench outside the home-shed, and keep her eye on them till morning.

"You are thinking of the Bishop of Tronyem's cattle," said Frolich.

"I am, dear. This is Midsummer Eve, you know, when, as we think, all the spirits love to be abroad."

"You will die before your time, Erica," said the weary girl. "These spirits give you no rest of body or mind. What a day's work we have done! And now you are going to watch, till twelve, one, two o'clock! I could not keep awake," she said, yawning, "if there was one demon at the head of the bed, and another at the foot, and the underground people running like mice all over the floor."

"Then go and sleep, dear. I will fetch your comb, if you will just keep an eye on the cattle for the moment I am gone."

As Erica combed Frolich's long fair hair, and admired its shine in the sunlight, and twisted it up behind, and curled it on each side, the weary girl leaned her head against her, and dropped asleep. When all was done, she just opened her eyes to find her way to bed, and say—

"You may as well go to bed comfortably; for you will certainly drop asleep here, if you don't there."

"Not with my pretty Spiel in sight. I would not lose my white heifer for seven nights' sleep. You will thank me when you find your cow, and all the rest, safe in the morning. Good-night, dear."

And Erica closed the door after her young mistress, and sat down on the bench outside, with her face towards the sun, her lure by her side, and her knitting in her hands. She was glad that the herd lay so, that by keeping her eye on them she could watch that wonder of Midsummer night within the Arctic Circle, the dipping of the sun below the horizon, to appear again immediately. She had

[1] Hair-brushes were unknown at the date of this story.

never been far enough to the north to see the sun complete its circle without disappearing at all; but she did not wish it. She thought the softening of the light which she was about to witness, and the speedy renewing of day, more wonderful and beautiful.

She sat, soothed by her employment and by the tranquillity of the scene, and free from fear. She had done her duty by the spirits of the mountain and the wood; and in case of the appearance of any object that she did not like, she could slip into the house in an instant. Her thoughts were therefore wholly Rolf's. She could endure now to contemplate a long life spent in doing honour to his memory by the industrious discharge of duty. She would watch over Peder, and receive his last breath—an office which should have been Rolf's. She would see another houseman arrive, and take possession of that house, and become betrothed, and marry; and no one, not even her watchful mistress, should see a trace of repining in her countenance, or hear a tone of bitterness from her lips. It should be her part to see that others were happier than she had been; that no presumption or carelessness should bring on them the displeasure of powerful beings. However weary her heart might be, she would dance at every wedding—of fellow-servant or of young mistress. She would cloud nobody's happiness, but would do all she could to make Rolf's memory pleasant to those who had known him, and wished him well. She thought she could do all this in prospect of the day when her grave should be dug beside those of Peder and Ulla, and when her spirit should meet Rolf, and learn at length how he had died, and be assured that he had watched over her as faithfully as she had remembered him.

As these thoughts passed through her mind, making her future life appear shorter and less dreary than she could have imagined possible a few hours before, her fingers were busily at work, and her eyes rested on the lovely scene before her—the flowery pasture in which the dappled herd were lying; while far, far beyond, a yellow glittering expanse of waters spread as if to receive the sinking sun. From the elevation at which she was, it appeared as if the ocean swelled up into the very sky, so

high was the horizon line; and between lay a vast region of rock and river, hill and dale, forest, fiord, and town, part in golden sunlight, part in deep shadow, but all, though bright as the skies could make it, silent as became the hour. As Erica found that she could glance at the sun itself without losing sight of the cattle, which still lay within her indirect vision, she carefully watched the descent of the orb, anxious to observe precisely when it should disappear, and how soon its golden spark would kindle up again from the waves. When its lower rim was just touching the waters, its circle seemed to be of an enormous size, and its whole mass to be flaming. Its appearance was very unlike that of the comparatively small, compact, brilliant luminary which rides the sky at noon. Erica was just thinking so, when a rustle in the thicket, within the pine grove, made her involuntarily turn her head in that direction. Instantly remembering that it was a common device of the underground people for one of them to make the watcher look away, in order that others might drive off the cattle, she resumed her duty, and gazed steadfastly at the herd. They were safe —neither reduced to the size of mice, nor wandering off, though she had let her eye glance away from them.

The sky, however, did not look itself. There were two suns in it. Now Erica really did quite forget the herd for some time, even her dear white heifer—while she stared bewildered at the spectacle before her eyes. There was one sun, the sun she had always known—half sunk in the sea, while above it hung another, round and complete, somewhat less bright perhaps, but as distinct and plain before her eyes as any object in heaven or earth had ever been. Her work dropped from her hands, as she covered her eyes for a moment. She started to her feet, and then looked again. It was still there, though the lower sun was almost gone. As she stood gazing, she once more heard the rustle in the wood. Though it crossed her mind that the wood-demon was doubtless there making choice of his axe and his tree, she could not move, and had not even a wish to take refuge in the house, so wonderful was this spectacle—the clearest instance of enchantment she had ever seen. Was it meant for good

—a token that the coming year was to be a doubly bright one? If not, how was she to understand it?

"Erica!" cried a voice at this moment from the wood—a voice which thrilled her whole frame. "My Erica!"

She not only looked towards the wood now, but sprang forwards; but her eyes were so dazzled by having gazed at the sun that she could see nothing. Then she remembered how many forms the cunning demon could assume, and she turned back thinking how cruel it was to delude her with her lover's voice, when instead of his form she should doubtless see some horrid monster—most likely a hippopotamus, or, at best, an overgrown bear showing its long, sharp, white teeth to terrify her. She turned in haste, and laid her hand on the latch of the door, glancing once more at the horizon.

There was now no sun at all. The burnish was gone from every point of the landscape, and a mild twilight reigned.

One good omen had vanished; but there was still enchantment around, for again she heard the thrilling "Erica!"

There was no huge beast glaring through the pine stems, and trampling down the thicket; but, instead, there was the figure of a man advancing from the shadow into the pasture.

"Why do you take that form?" said the trembling girl, sinking down on the bench. "I had rather have seen you as a bear. Did you not find the axe? I laid it for you. Pray—pray, come no nearer."

"I must, my love, to show you that it is your own Rolf. Erica, do not let your superstition come for ever between us."

She held out her arms—she could not rise, though she strove to do so. Rolf sat beside her—she felt his kisses on her forehead—she felt his heart beat—she felt that not even a spirit could assume the very tones of that voice.

"Do forgive me," she murmured; "but it is Midsummer Eve, and I felt so sure——"

"As sure of my being the demon as I am sure there is

no cruel spirit here, though it is Midsummer Eve. Look, love! see how the day smiles upon us!"

And he pointed to where a golden star seemed to kindle on the edge of the sea. It was the sun again, rising after its few minutes of absence.

"I saw two just now," cried Erica—"two suns. Where are we, really? And how is all this? And where do you come from?"

And she gazed, still wistfully, doubtfully, in her lover's face.

"I will show you," said he, smiling. And while he still held her with one arm, lest in some sudden fancy she should fly him as a ghost, he used the other hand to empty his pockets of the beautiful shells he had brought, tossing them into her lap.

"Did you ever see such, Erica? I have been where they lie in heaps. Did you ever see such beauties?"

"I never did, Rolf; you have been at the bottom of the sea."

And once more she shrank from what she took for the grasp of a drowned man.

"Not to the bottom, love," replied he, still clasping her hand. "Our fiord is deep, perhaps as deep as they say. I dived as deep as a man may to come up with the breath in his body, but I could never find the bottom. Did I not tell you that I should go down as far as Vogel island, and that I should there be safe?"

"Yes! You did—you did!"

"Well! I went to Vogel island, and here I am safe!"

"It *is* you! We are together again!" she exclaimed, now in full belief. "Thank God! Thank God!"

As she wept upon his shoulder, he told her where he had been, what perils he had met, how he had been saved, and how he had arrived the first moment he could; and then he went on to declare that their enemies would soon be disposed of, that they would be married, that they would take possession of Peder's house, and make him comfortable, and would never be separated again as long as they lived.

They did not heed the time, as they talked and talked; and Rolf was just telling how he had more than once

seen a double sun without finding any remarkable consequences follow, when Stiorna came forth with her milk pails just before four o'clock. She started and dropped one of her pails when she saw who was sitting on the bench, and Erica started no less at the thought of how completely she had forgotten the cattle and the underground people all this time. The herd was all safe, however—every cow as large as life, and looking exactly like itself, so that the good fortune of this Midsummer Eve had been perfect.

## CHAPTER XV

### MOUNTAIN FARE

THE appearance of Stiorna reminded the lovers that it was time to begin the business of the morning. They startled Stiorna with the news that a large company was coming to breakfast. Being in no very amiable temper towards happy lovers, she refused after a moment's thought to believe what they said, and sat down sulking to her task of milking. So Rolf proceeded to rouse Jan, and Erica stepped to Frolich's bedside, and waked her with a kiss.

"Erica! No, can it be?" said the active girl, up in a moment. "You look too happy to be Erica."

"Erica never was so happy before, dear, that is the reason. You were right, Frolich—bless your kind heart for it! Rolf was not dead. He is here."

Frolich gallopaded round the room, like one crazy, before proceeding to dress.

"Whenever you like to stop," said Erica, laughing, "I have some good news for you too."

"I am to go and see the bishop!" cried Frolich, clapping her hands, and whirling round on one foot like an opera-dancer.

"Not so, Frolich."

"There now! you promise me good news, and then you won't let me go and see the bishop when you know that is the only thing in the world I want or wish for!"

"Would it not be a great compliment to you, and save you a great deal of trouble, if the bishop were to come here to see you?"

"Ah! that would be a pretty sight! The Bishop of Tronyem over the ankles in the sodden, trodden pasture —sticking in the mud of Sulitelma! The Bishop of Tronyem sleeping upon hay in the loft, and eating his dinner off a wooden platter! That would be the most wonderful sight that Nordland ever saw."

"Prepare, then, to see the Bishop of Tronyem drink his morning coffee out of a wooden bowl. Meantime, I must go and grind his coffee. Seriously, Frolich, you must make haste to dress and help. The pirates want to carry off the bishop for ransom. Erlingsen is raising the country. Hund is coming here as a prisoner, and the bishop, and my mistress, and Orga, to be safe; and if you do not help me I shall have nothing ready, for Stiorna does not like the news."

Never had Frolich dressed more quickly. She thought it very hard that the bishop should see her when she had nothing but her dairy dress to wear, but she was ready all the sooner for this. Erica consoled her with her belief that the bishop was the last person who could be supposed to make a point of a silk gown for a mountain maiden.

A consultation about the arrangements was held before the door by the four who were in a good humour, for Stiorna remained aloof. This, like other mountain dwellings, was a mere sleeping and eating shed, only calculated for a bare shelter at night, at meals, and from occasional rain. There was no apartment at the seater in which the bishop could hold an audience, out of the way of the cooking and other household transactions. It could not be expected of him to sit on the bench outside, or on the grass, like the people of the establishment; for, unaccustomed as he was to spend his days in the open air, his eyes would be blinded, and his face blistered by the sun. The young people cast their eyes on the pine wood as the fittest summer parlour for him, if it could be provided with seats.

Erica sprang forward to prevent any one from entering the wood till she should have seen what state the place was in on this particular morning. No trees had been felled, and no branches cut since the night before, and the axes remained where they had been hung. The demon had not wanted them, it seemed, and there was no fear of intruding upon him now. So the two young men set to work to raise a semicircular range of turf seats in the pleasantest part of the shady grove. The central seat, which was raised above the rest, and had a footstool, was well cushioned with dry and soft moss, and

the rough bark was cut from the trunk of the tree against which it was built, so that the stem served as a comfortable back to the chair. Rolf tried the seat when finished, and as he leaned back, feasting his eyes on the vast sunny landscape which was to be seen between the trees of the grove, he declared that it was infinitely better to sit here than in the bishop's stall in Tronyem Cathedral.

"Surely," said Erica, whom he had summoned to see the work, "when God plants a lofty mountain, overlooking the glorious sea, with the heavens themselves for a roof, He makes a temple with which no church built by men can compare. I suppose men build cathedrals in cities because they are not so happy as to have a mountain to worship on."

"How I pity the countries that have no glorious mountains!" cried Frolich, "especially if few of their people live in sight of the vast sea, or in the heart of deep forests."

And, by one impulse, they all struck up the national air *For Norgé*—a thanksgiving for their home being planted in the midst of the northern seas.

All being done now for which a strong arm was wanted, Rolf declared that he and Jan must be gone to the farm. Not a man could be spared from the shores of the fiord till the affairs of the pirates should be settled. Erica ought to have expected to hear this, but her cheek grew white as it was told. She spoke no word of objection, however, seeing plainly what her lover's duty was.

She turned towards the dairy when he was gone, instead of indulging herself with watching him down the mountain. She was busy skimming bowl after bowl of rich milk, when Frolich ran in to say that Stiorna had dressed herself, and put up her bundle, and was setting forth homewards to see, as she said, the truth of things there—which meant, of course, to learn Hund's condition and prospects. It was now necessary to tell her that she would presently see Hund brought up to the seater a prisoner, and that the farm was no place for any but fighting men this day. To save her feelings and temper, Erica asked her to watch the herd, leading them to a point whence she could soonest see the expected company mounting the uplands:

Frolich shook her head often and mournfully over the breakfast. The skill and diligent hands of two people could not, up in the clouds here, cover the long table in a way which appeared at all creditable to Nordland eyes. Do what they would, it was only bread, cheese, butter, berries, and cream, and then berries and cream, butter, cheese, and bread. They garnished with moss, leaves, and flowers; they disposed their few bowls and platters to the best advantage, taking some from the dairy which could ill be spared. It was still but a poor apology for a feast, and Frolich looked so ready to cry as to make Erica laugh.

Presently, however, there were voices heard from the hill above. Some traveller who had met the budstick had reported the proceedings below, and the news had spread to a northern seater. The men had gone down to the fiord, and here were the women with above a gallon of strawberries, fresh gathered, and a score of plovers' eggs. Next appeared a pony, coming westward over the pasture, laden with panniers containing a tender kid, a packet of spices, a jar of preserved cherries, and a few of the present season, early ripe, and a stone bottle of ant vinegar.[1] Frolich's spirits rose higher and higher, as more people came from below, sent by Rolf on his way down. A deputation of Lapps came from the tents, bringing reindeer venison, and half of a fine Gammel cheese. Before Erica had had time to pour out a glass of corn-brandy for each of this dwarfish party, in token of thanks, and because it is considered unlucky to send away Lapps without a treat, other mountain dwellers came with offerings of tydder, roer, ryper, and jerper,[2] so that the dresser was loaded with game enough to feed half a hundred hungry men.

Some of these willing neighbours stayed to help. One went to pick more cloudberries on the edge of the nearest

[1] Ants abound in Norway, both in the forests and on the mountains. Some, of a large kind, are boiled for the sake of the (formic) acid they contain; and the water, when strained, is used for vinegar. It is as good as weak vinegar.

[2] Tydder and roer are the cock and hen of the wild bird called in Scotland the capercailzie. The ryper is the ptarmigan. The jerper is of the grouse species.—Lloyd's *Field Sports of the North of Europe.*

bog. Another rode off on the pony to beg a supply of sugar from a house where it was known to abound. Two or three more cleared a space for a fire behind a thicket, and prepared to broil the venison and stew the kid, while others sat down to pluck the game. The Lapps, as being dirty and despised, were got rid of as soon as possible.

Erica and Frolich returned to their breakfast-table, to make the new arrangements now necessary, and place the fruit and spices. Erica closely examined the piece of Gammel cheese brought by the Lapps, and then, with glowing cheeks, called Frolich to her.

"What now?" said Frolich. "Have you found a way of telling fortunes with the hard cheese, as some pretend to do with the soft curds?"

"Look here," said Erica. "What stamp is this? The cheese has been scraped—almost pared, you see, but they have left one little corner. And whose stamp is there?"

"Ours," said Frolich coolly. "This is the cheese you laid out on the ridge last night."

"I believe it. I see it," exclaimed Erica.

"Now, dear Erica, do not let us have the old story of your being frightened about what the demon will say and do. Nobody but you will be surprised that the Lapps help themselves with good things that lie strewing the ground. You know I gave you a hint, just twelve hours since, of what would become of this same cheese."

"You did," admitted Erica. To Frolich's delight and surprise she appeared too busy—or was rather, perhaps, too happy—to lament this mischance, as she would formerly have done. Possibly she comforted herself with thinking that if the demon had set its heart upon the cheese, it might have been beforehand with the Lapps. She contented herself with setting apart the dish till her mistress should decide what ought to be done with it. Just when a youth from the highest pasture on Sulitelma had come running and panting, to present Frolich with a handful of fringed pinks and blue gentian, plucked from the very edge of the glacier, so that their colours were reflected in the ice, Stiorna appeared in haste to tell that a party on horseback and on foot were winding out of the

ravine, and coming straight up over the pasture. All was now certainty, and great was the bustle to put out of sight all unseemly tokens of preparation. In the midst of the hurry Frolich found time to twist some of her pretty flowers into her pretty hair, so that it might easily chance that the bishop would not miss her silk gown. When, however, were unfashionable mothers known to forget the interests of their daughters? Madame Erlingsen never did; and she now engaged one of the bishop's followers to ride forward with a certain bundle which Orga had carried on her lap. The man discharged his errand so readily that, on the arrival of the train, Frolich was seen so dressed, walking "in silk attire," as to appear to all eyes as the daughter of the hostess.

The bishop's reputation preceded him, as is usual in such cases.

"Where is he now?" "How far off is he?" "Why does he not come?" asked one and another of the expectant people of those who first appeared before the seater.

"He is at the tents, speaking to the Lapps."

"Speaking to the Lapps! impossible! What Lapp would ever dream of being spoken to by a Bishop of Tronyem?"

"He is with them, however. When I left him, he was just stooping to enter one of their tents."

"Now you must be joking. The Lapps are low people enough in the open pasture, but in their tents—pah!"

He did not go in without a reason. There was a sick child in the tent who could not come out to him. The mother wished him to see and pronounce upon the charms she was employing for her child's benefit, and he himself chose to be satisfied whether any medical knowledge which he possessed could avail to restore the sick. Nothing was more certain than that the Bishop of Tronyem was in a Lapland tent. The fact was confirmed by M. Kollsen, who next appeared, musing as he rode, with countenance of extreme gravity (to say the least of it). He would fain have denied that his bishop was smiling upon Lapps who wore charms, but he could not. He muttered that it was very extraordinary.

"Quite as much so," whispered Erica to Frolich, "as that the Holiest should be found in the house of a publican."

"What is that?" inquired the vigilant M. Kollsen. "What was your remark?"

Erica blushed deeply; but Frolich readily declared what it was that she had said; and in return M. Kollsen remarked on the evil of ignorant persons applying Scripture according to their own narrow notions.

"Two—four—eight horses," observed a herdsman. "I think the neighbours should each take one or two; or here will soon be an end of Erlingsen's new hay. This lot of pasture will never feed eight horses, besides his own and the herd."

"Better than having them carried off by the pirates," said a neighbour. "But I will run home and send a load of grass."

In such an amiable mood did the bishop find all who were awaiting him at his place of refuge. On their part, they were persuaded that he deserved all their love, even if he had some low notions about the Lapps.

As the bishop's horse, followed by those which bore the ladies, reached the house door, all present cried—

"Welcome to the mountain!" "Welcome to Sulitelma!"

The bishop observed that, often as he had wished to look abroad from Sulitelma, and to see with his own eyes what life at the seaters was like, he should have grown old without the desire being gratified, but for the design of the enemy upon him. It was all he could do to go the rounds of his diocese, from station to station below, without thinking of journeys of pleasure. Yet here he was on Sulitelma!

When he and M. Kollsen and the ladies had dismounted, and were entering the house to breakfast, the gazers found leisure to observe the hindmost of the train of riders. It was Hund, with his feet tied under his horse, and the bridle held by a man on each side. He had seen and heard too much of the preparations against the enemy to be allowed to remain below, or at large anywhere, till the attack should be over. He could not dis-

IT WAS HUND, WITH HIS FEET TIED UNDER HIS HORSE,
AND THE BRIDLE HELD BY A MAN ON EACH SIDE

mount till some one untied his legs; and no one would do that till a safe place could be found in which to confine him. It was an awkward situation enough, sitting there bound before everybody's eyes; and not the less for Stiorna's leaning her head against the horse, and crying at seeing him so treated; and yet Hund had often been seen, on small occasions, to look far more black and miserable. His face now was almost cheerful. Stiorna praised this as a sign of bravery; but the truth was, the party had been met by Rolf and Jan going down the mountain. It was no longer possible to take Rolf for a ghost; and though Hund was as far as possible from understanding the matter, he was unspeakably relieved to find that he had not the death of his rival to answer for. It made his countenance almost gay to think of this, even while stared at by men, women, and children as a prisoner.

"What is it?" whimpered Stiorna—"what are you a prisoner for, Hund?"

"Ask them that know," said Hund. "I thought at first that it was on Rolf's account; and now that they see with their own eyes that Rolf is safe, they best know what they have to bring against me."

"It is no secret," said Madame Erlingsen. "Hund was seen with the pirates, acting with and assisting them, when they committed various acts of thievery on the shores of the fiord. If the pirates are taken, Hund will be tried with them for robberies at Thore's, Kyril's, Tank's and other places along the shore, about which information has been given by a witness."

"Thore's, Kyril's, and Tank's!" repeated Hund to himself; "then there must be magic in the case. I could have sworn that not an eye on earth witnessed the doings there. If Rolf turns out to be the witness, I shall be certain that he has the powers of the region to help him."

So little is robbery to be dreaded at the seaters, that there really was no place where Hund could be fastened in—no lock upon any door—not a window from which he might not escape. The zealous neighbours therefore, whose interest it was to detain him, offered to take it in

turn to be beside him, his right arm tied to the left of another man. And thus it was settled.

After breakfast, notice was given that the party who had travelled all night wished to repose for a few hours. All others therefore withdrew to secure quiet, some within the pine wood; others to the nearest breezy hill, to gossip and sport; while some few took the opportunity of going home, to see after their cattle, or other domestic affairs, intending to return in the afternoon.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OLD TALES AND BETTER TIDINGS

When the bishop came forth in the afternoon to take his seat in the shade of the wood, those who were there assembled were singing *For Norgé*. Instead of permitting them to stop, on account of his arrival, he joined in the song; and solely because his heart was in it. Seldom had he witnessed such a scene as this; and as he looked around him, and saw deep shades and sunny uplands, blue glaciers above, green pastures and glittering waters below, and all around, herds on every hillside, he felt his love of old Norway, and his thankfulness for being one of her sons, as warm as that of any one of the singers in the wood. Out of the fulness of his heart, the good bishop addressed his companions on the goodness of God in creating such a land, and placing them in it, with their happiness so far in their own hands as that little worthy of being called evil could befall them, except through faults of their own. M. Kollsen, who had before uttered his complaints of the superstition of his flock, hoped that his bishop was now about to attack the mischief vigorously.

The bishop, however, only took his seat—the mossy seat prepared for him—and declared himself to be now at the service of any who wished to consult or converse with him. Instead of thrusting his own opinions and reproofs upon them, as it was M. Kollsen's wont to do, he waited for the people to open their minds to him in their own way; and by this means, whatever he found occasion to say had double influence from coming naturally. The words dropped by him that day to the anxious mother awaiting the confirmation of her child—to the young person preparing for that important event — to the bereaved—to the penitent—to the thoughtless—and to those who wondered why God had given them so many

rich blessings—what the good bishop said to all these was so fit and so welcome, that not a word was forgotten through long years after; and he was quoted half a century after he had been in his grave, as old Ulla had quoted the good Bishop of Tronyem of her day.

In a few hours, many of the people were gone for the present, some being wanted at home, and others for the expected affair on the fiord. The bishop and M. Kollsen had thought themselves alone in their shady retreat, when they saw Erica lingering near among the trees. With a kind smile, the bishop beckoned to her, and bade her sit down, and tell him whether he had not been right in promising a while ago that God would soothe her sorrows with time, as is the plan of His kind providence. He remembered well the story of the death of her mother. Erica replied that not only had her grief been soothed, but that she was now so blessed that her heart was burdened with its gratitude. She wished—she needed to pour out all that she felt; but M. Kollsen was there, and she could not speak quite freely before him. He, for his part, observed that, if she was now so happy, she must have given up some of her superstitions; for certainly he had never known any one less likely to enjoy peace than Erica, on all occasions on which he had seen her —so great was her dread of evil spirits on every hand.

"I wish," said Erica, with a sigh—"I do wish I knew what to think about Nipen."

"Ay! here it comes," observed M. Kollsen, folding his arms as if for an argument.

Encouraged by the bishop, Erica told the whole story of the last few months, from the night of Oddo's prank to that which found her at the feet of her friend; for she had cast herself down at the bishop's feet, sitting as she had done in her childhood, looking up in his face.

"You want to know what I think of all this?" said the bishop, when she had done. "I think that you could hardly help believing as you have believed, amidst these strange circumstances, and with your mind full of the common accounts of Nipen. Yet I do not believe there is any such spirit as Nipen, or any demon in the forest, or on the mountain. Did you ever hear what spirits every-

body in this country believed in before the blessed Gospel was brought to old Norway?"

"I have heard of Thor—that yonder islet was named after; and that, when there was a tempest, with rolling thunder, such as we never hear in this region,[1] the people used to say it was Thor driving his chariot over the mountain ridge."

"That was what people said of the thunder. What they said of fire and frost was that they were giants called Loke and Thrym, who dwelt in a dreadful tempestuous place at the end of the earth, and came abroad to do awful things among men. The giant Frost drove home his horses at night—the hail-clouds that sped through the air; and there sat the giant on the frost winds, combing the manes of his horses as they went. Fire was a cunning demon that stole in where it was not wanted; and when once in, it devoured all that it chose, till it rose into the sky at last in smoke. Then there was the giant Ægir, who brought in squalls from the sea, and made whirlpools in the fiords."

"Why, that is like Nipen."

"Very like Nipen; perhaps the same. Then there was the good god Balder (the white god), who made everything bright and beautiful, and ripened the fruits of the earth. This god Balder was the sun. Then there were the three magical women, the Fates, who made men's lives happy or miserable. Did you ever hear how these giants and Fates were worshipped before Jehovah and Christ were known in this land?"

"I have heard Ulla sing many old songs about these, and more; and how Thor and two companions, as mighty as himself, were travelling, and entered a curious house for the night, and wandered about in the great house, being frightened at a strange loud noise outside; and how they found in the morning that this house was the mitten of a giant infinitely greater than themselves; and that what they had taken for a separate chamber in the great house was the thumb of his mitten; and that the strange

[1] Erica knew thunder only by report, as there is none so far north as the part of Nordland where she lived. Thunder ceases at 66 degrees of latitude.

noise was the snoring of this giant Skrymir, who was asleep close by, after having pulled off his mittens."

"This is one of the many tales belonging to the old religion of this country. And how did this old religion arise? Why, the people saw grand spectacles every day, and heard wonders whichever way they turned; and they supposed that the whole universe was alive. The sun as it travelled they thought was alive, and kind and good to men. The tempest they thought was alive, and angry with men. The fire and frost they thought were alive, pleased to make sport with men."

"As people who ought to know better," observed M. Kollsen, "now think the wind is alive, and call it Nipen; or the mist of the lake and river, which they call the sprite Uldra."

"It is true," said the bishop, "that we now have better knowledge, and see that the earth, and all that is in it, is made and moved by one Good Spirit, who, instead of sporting with men, or being angry with them, rules all things for their good. But I am not surprised that some of the old stories remain, and are believed in still, and by good and dutiful Christians too. The mother sings the old songs over the cradle, and the child hears tell of sprites and demons before it hears of the good God, who 'sends forth the snow and rain, the hail and vapour, and the stormy winds fulfilling His word.' And when the child is grown to be a man or woman, the northern lights shooting over the sky, and the sighing of the winds in the pine forest, bring back those old songs and old thoughts about demons and sprites, and the stoutest man trembles. I do not wonder, nor do I blame any man or woman for this, though I wish they were as happy as the weakest infant or the most worn-out old man, who has learned from the gentle Jesus to fear nothing at any time, because His Father was with Him.

"But what is to be done?" asked M. Kollsen.

"The time will come," said the bishop, "when the mother will sing to her babe of the gentle Jesus; and tell her growing child of how He loved to be alone with His Father in the waste and howling wilderness; and bade His disciples not be afraid when there was a tempest on

the wide lake. Then, when the child grows up to be a man, if he finds himself alone on the mountain or in the forest, he will think of Jesus, and fear no demon; and if a west wind and fog should overtake a woman in her boat on the fiord," he continued, looking with a smile at Erica, " she will never think of Nipen, but rather that she hears her Saviour saying, ' Why are ye afraid, O ye of little faith? ' "

Erica hid her face, ashamed under the good man's smile.

" In our towns," continued he, " much of this blessed change is already wrought. No one in my city of Tronyem now fears the angry and cunning fire-giant Loke; but every citizen closes his eyes in peace when he hears the midnight cry of the watch, ' Except the Lord keepeth the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.' [1] In the wilds of the country every man's faith will hereafter be his watchman, crying out upon all that happens, ' It is the Lord's hand: let Him do what seemeth to Him good! ' This might have been said, Erica, as it appears to me, at every turn of your story, where you and your friends were not in fault."

He went on to remark on the story she had told him; and she was really surprised to find that there was not the slightest reason to suppose that any spirit had been employed to vex and alarm her. The fog and the pirates had overtaken and frightened many in the fiord with whom Nipen had no quarrel. Rolf's imprisonment, and all the sorrows that belonged to it, had been owing to his own imprudence. The appearance of a double sun the night before was nothing uncommon, and was known to take place when the atmosphere was in a particular state. She herself had seen that no wood-demon had touched the axes in this very grove last night; and that it was no mountain sprite, but a Laplander, who had taken up the first Gammel cheese. She had also witnessed how absurdly mistaken Hund had been about the boat having been spirited away, and Vogel island being enchanted, and Rolf's ghost being allowed to haunt him. Here was a case before her very eyes of the way in which people with

[1] The watchman's call in the towns of Norway.

superstitious minds may misunderstand what happens to themselves.

"Oh!" exclaimed Erica, dropping her hands from before her glowing face, "if I dared but think there were no bad spirits; if I dared only hope that everything that happens is done by God's own hand, I could bear everything! I would never be afraid again!"

"It is what I believe," said the bishop. Laying his hand on her head, he continued—

"We know that the very hairs of your head are all numbered. I see that you are weary of your fears; that you have long been heavy laden with anxiety. It is you, then, that He invites to trust Him, when He says by the lips of Jesus, 'Come ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.'"

"Rest; rest is what I have wanted," said Erica, while her tears flowed gently; "but Peder and Ulla did not believe as you do, and could not explain things; and——"

"You should have asked me," said M. Kollsen; "I could have explained everything."

"Perhaps so, sir; but—but, M. Kollsen, you always seemed angry, and you said you despised us for believing anything that you did not; and it is the most difficult thing in the world to ask questions which one knows will be despised."

M. Kollsen glanced in the bishop's face, to see how he took this, and how he meant to support the pastor's authority. The bishop looked sad, and said nothing.

"And then," continued Erica, "there were others who laughed—even Rolf himself laughed; and what one fears becomes only the more terrible when it is laughed at."

"Very true," said the bishop. "When Jesus sat on the well in Samaria, and taught how the true worship was come, He neither frowned on the woman who inquired, nor despised her, nor made light of her superstition about a sacred mountain."

There was a long silence, which was broken at last by Erica asking the bishop whether he could not console poor Hund, who wanted comfort more than she had ever done. The bishop replied, that the demons who most tormented poor Hund were not abroad on the earth or in the air, but

within his breast—his remorse, his envy, his covetousness, his fear. He meant, however, not to lose sight of poor Hund, either in the prison, to which he was to travel to-morrow, or after he should come out of it.

Here Frolich appeared, running to ask whether those who were in the grove would not like to look forth from the ridge, and see what good the budstick had done, and how many parties were on their way, from all quarters, to the farm.

M. Kollsen was glad to rise and escape from what he thought a schooling; and the bishop himself was as interested in what was going on as if the farm had been his home. He was actually the first at the ridge.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE WATCH ON THE HILL

This part of the mountain was a singularly favourable situation for seeing what was doing on the spot on which every one's attention was fixed this day. While the people on the fiord could not see what was going forward at Saltdalen, nor those at Saltdalen what were the movements at the farm, the watchers on the ridge could observe the proceedings at all the three points. The opportunity was much improved by the bishop having a glass—a glass of a quality so rare at that time that there would probably have been some talk of magic and charms if it had been seen in Olaf's hands instead of the bishop's.

By means of this glass the bishop, M. Kollsen, or Madame Erlingsen announced from time to time what was doing as the evening advanced—how parties of two or three were leaving Saltdalen, creeping towards the farm under cover of rising grounds, rocks, and pine woods; how small companies, well armed, were hidden in every place of concealment near Erlingsen's, and how there seemed to be a great number of women about the place. This was puzzling. Who these women could be, and why they should choose to resort to the farm when its female inhabitants had left it for safety, it was difficult at first to imagine. But the truth soon occurred to Frolich. No doubt some one had remembered how strange and suspicious it would appear to the pirates, who supposed the bishop to be at the farm, that there should be no women in the company assembled to meet him. No doubt these people in blue, white, and green petticoats, who were striding about the yards, and looking forth from the galleries, were men dressed in their wives' clothes, or in such as Erlingsen furnished from the family chests. This disguise was as good as an ambush, while it also served

to give the place the festive appearance looked for by the enemy. It was found afterwards that Oddo had acted as lady's-maid, fitting the gowns to the shortest men, and dressing up their heads so as best to hide the shaggy hair. Great numbers were certainly assembled before night; yet still a little group might be seen now and then winding down from some recess of the wide-spreading mountain, making circuits by the ravines and watercourses, so as to avoid crossing the upland slopes, which the pirates might be surveying by means of such a glass as the bishop's.

The bishop was of opinion that scarcely a blow would be struck, so great was the country force compared with that of the pirates. He believed that the enemy would be overpowered and disarmed, almost without a struggle. Erica, who could not but tremble with fear as well as expectation, blessed his words in her heart, and so, in truth, did every woman present.

No one thought of going to rest, though Madame Erlingsen urged it upon those over whom she had influence. Finding that Erica had sat up to watch the cattle the night before, she compelled her to go and lie down, but no compulsion could make her sleep; and Orga and Frolich did the best they could for her, by running to her with news of any fresh appearance below. Just after midnight they brought her word that the bishop had ordered every one but M. Kollsen away from the ridge. The schooner had peeped out from behind the promontory, and was stealing up with a soft west wind.

"A west wind!" exclaimed Erica. "Any fog?"

"No, not a flake of mist. Neither you nor any one will say that Nipen is favourable to the enemy to-night, Erica."

"You will hear me say less of Nipen henceforward," said Erica.

"That is wise for to-night, at least. Here is the west wind, but only to waft the enemy into our hands. But have you really left off believing in Nipen, and the whole race of sprites?"

These words jarred on Erica's yet timid feelings. She replied that she must take time for thought, as she had much to think about; but the bishop had to-day spoken

words which she believed would, when well considered, lift a heavy load from her heart.

The girls kindly left this impression undisturbed, and went on to describe how the schooner was working up, and why the bishop thought that the people at the farm were aware of every inch of her progress.

Erica sprang from the bed, and joined the group who were sitting on the grass awaiting the sunrise, and eagerly listening for every word from their watchman, the bishop. He told when he saw two boats, full of men, put off from the schooner, and creep towards Erlingsen's cove under the shadow of the rocks. He told how the country people immediately gathered behind the barn and the house, and every outbuilding; and, at length, when the boats touched the shore, he said—

"Now come and look yourselves. They are too busy now to be observing us."

Then how eyes were strained, and what silence there was, broken only by an occasional exclamation, as it became certain that the decisive moment was come! The glass passed rapidly from hand to hand, but it revealed little. There was smoke, covering a struggling crowd; and such gazers as had a husband, a father, or a lover there, could look no longer. The bishop himself did not attempt to comfort them, at a moment when he knew it would be in vain.

In the midst of all this, some one observed two boats appearing from behind the promontory, and making directly and rapidly for the schooner; and presently there was a little smoke there too, only a puff or two, and then all was quiet till she began to hang out her sails, which had been taken in, and to glide over the waters in the direction of a small sandy beach, on which she ran straight up, till she was evidently fast grounded.

"Excellent!" exclaimed M. Kollsen. "How admirably they are conducting the whole affair! The retreat of these fellows is completely cut off—their vessel taken, and driven ashore, while they are busy elsewhere."

"That is Oddo's doings," observed Orga quietly.

"Oddo's doings! How do you know? Are you serious? Can you see? Or did you hear?"

"I was by when Oddo told his plan to my father, and begged to be allowed to take the schooner. My father laughed so that I thought Oddo would be for going over to the enemy."

"No fear of that," said Erica. "Oddo has a brave, faithful heart."

"And," said his mistress, "a conscience and temper which will keep him meek and patient till he has atoned for mischief that he thinks he has done."

"I must see more of this boy," observed the bishop. "Did your father grant his request?" he inquired of Orga.

"At last he did. Oddo said that a young boy could do little good in the fight at the farm; but that he might lead a party to attack the schooner, in the absence of almost all her crew. He said it was no more than a boy might do, with half-a-dozen lads to help him; for he had reason to feel sure that only just hands enough to manage her would be left on board, and those the weakest of the pirate party. My father said there were men to spare, and he put twelve, well armed, under Oddo's orders."

"Who would submit to be under Oddo's command?" asked Frolich, laughing at the idea.

"Twice twelve, if he had wanted so many," replied Orga. "Between the goodness of the joke and their zeal, there were volunteers in plenty—my father told me, as he was putting me on my horse."

In a very few minutes all signs of fighting were over at the farm. But there was a fire. The barn was seen to smoke and then to flame. It was plain that the neighbours were at liberty to attend to the fire, and had no fighting on their hands. They were seen to form a line from the burning barn to the brink of the water, and to hand buckets till the fire was out. The barn had been nearly empty, and the fire did not spread farther; so that Madame Erlingsen herself did not spend one grudging thought on this small sacrifice, in return for their deliverance from the enemy, who, she had feared, would ransack her dwelling, and fire it over her children's heads. She was satisfied and thankful, if indeed the pirates were taken.

At the bishop's question about who would go down the

mountain for news, each of Hund's guards begged to be the man. The swiftest of foot was chosen, and off he went—not without a barley-cake and brandy-flask—at a pace which promised speedy tidings.

As Madame Erlingsen hoped in her heart, he met a messenger despatched by her husband; so that all who had lain down to sleep—all but herself, that is—were greeted by good news as they appeared at the breakfast-table. The pirates were all taken, and on their way, bound, to Saltdalen, there to be examined by the magistrate, and, no doubt, thence transferred to the jail at Tronyem. Hund was to follow immediately, either to take his trial with them, or to appear as evidence against them.

One of the pirates was wounded, and two of the country people, but not a life was lost; and Erlingsen, Rolf, Peder, and Oddo were all safe and unhurt.

Oddo was superintending the unlading of the schooner, and was appointed by the magistrate, at his master's desire, head guard of the property, as it lay on the beach, till the necessary evidence of its having been stolen by the pirates was taken, and the owners could be permitted to identify and resume their property. Oddo was certainly the greatest man concerned in the affair, after Erlingsen. And like a really great man, Oddo's head was not turned with his importance, but intent on the perfect discharge of his office. When it was finished, and he returned to his home, he found he cared more for the pressure of his grandfather's hand upon his head, as the old man blessed his boy, than for all the praises of the whole country round.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### TO CHURCH

An idea occurred to everybody but one, within the next few hours, which occasioned some consultation. Everybody but Erica felt and said that it would be a great honour and privilege, but one not undeserved by the district, for the Bishop of Tronyem to marry Rolf and Erica before he left Nordland. The bishop wished to make some acknowledgment for the zealous protection and hospitality which had been afforded him; and he soon found that no act would be so generally acceptable as his blessing the union of these young people. He spoke to Madame Erlingsen about it, and her only doubt was whether it was not too soon after the burial of old Ulla. If Peder, however, should not object on this ground, no one else had a right to do so.

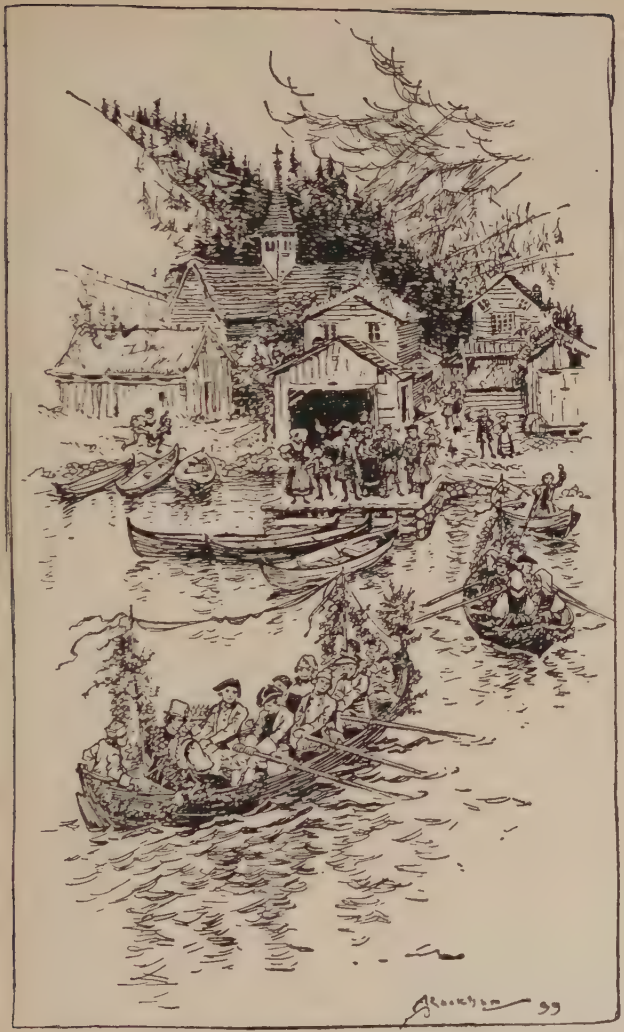
So far from objecting, Peder shed tears of pleasure at the thought. He was sure Ulla would be delighted, if she knew—would feel it an honour to herself that her place should be filled by one whose marriage-crown should be blessed by the bishop himself. Erica was startled, and had several good reasons to give why there should be no hurry; but she was brought round to see that Rolf could go to Tronyem to give his evidence against the pirates, even better after his marriage than before, because he would leave Peder in a condition of greater comfort; and she even smiled to herself as she thought how rapidly she might improve the appearance of the house during his absence, so that he should delight in it on his return. When the bishop assured her that she should not be hurried into her marriage within two days, but that he would appoint a day and hour when he should be at the distant church, to confirm the young people resident lower down the fiord, she gratefully consented, wondering

at the interest so high and revered a man seemed to feel in her lot. When it was once settled that the wedding was to be next week, she gave hearty aid to the preparations, as freely and openly as if she was not herself to be the bride.

The bishop embarked immediately on descending the mountain. His considerate eye saw at a glance that there was necessarily much confusion at the farm, and that his further presence would be an inconvenience. So he bade his host and the neighbours farewell for a short time, desiring them not to fail to meet him again at the church on his summons.

The kindness of the neighbours did not cease when danger from the enemy was over. Some offered boats for the wedding procession, several sent gilt paper to adorn the bridal crown which Orga and Frolich were making, and some yielded a more important assistance still. They put trusty persons into the seater, and over the herd, for two days, so that all Erlingsen's household might be at the wedding. Stiorna preferred making butter, and gazing southwards, to attending the wedding of Hund's rival; but every one else was glad to go. Nobody would have thought of urging Peder's presence, but he chose to do his part—(a part which no one could discharge so well)—singing bridal songs in the leading boat.

The summons arrived quite as soon as it could have been looked for, and the next day there was as pretty a boat-procession on the still waters of the fiord as had ever before glided over its surface. Within the memory of man, no bride had been prettier—no crown more glittering—no bridegroom more happy—no chanting was ever more soothing than old Peder's—no clarionet better played than Oddo's—no bridesmaids more gay and kindly than Orga and Frolich. The neighbours were hearty in their cheers as the boats put off, and the cheers were repeated from every settlement in the coves and on the heights of the fiord, and were again taken up by the echoes till the summer air seemed to be full of gladness. The birds of the islands, and the leaping fish, might perhaps wonder as the train of bowery boats floated down—for every boat was dressed with green boughs and garlands



AS PRETTY A BOAT-PROCESSION ON THE STILL WATERS OF THE FIORD AS HAD EVER BEFORE GLIDED OVER ITS SURFACE

N 429

of flowers—but the matter was understood and rejoiced in by all others.

To conclude, the bishop was punctual, and kindly in his welcome of Erica to the altar. He was also graciously pleased with Rolf's explanation that he had not ventured to bring a gift for so great a dignitary, but that he hoped the bishop would approve of his giving his humble offering to the church instead. The six sides of the new pulpit were nearly finished now, and Rolf desired to take upon himself the carving of the basement as his marriage-fee. As the bishop smiled approbation, M. Kollsen bowed acquiescence, and Rolf found himself in prospect of indoor work for some time to come.

Erica carried home in her heart, and kept there for ever, certain words of the bishop's address which he uttered with his eye kindly fixed upon hers. "Go, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. So shall you not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. When you shall have made the Lord your habitation, you shall not fear that evil may befall you, or that any plague shall come nigh your dwelling. Go, and peace be on your house!"

MERDHIN

# MERDHIN

## CHAPTER I

### A LORD DANE ON A VISIT

THERE is reason to believe that, a thousand years ago, one of the prettiest rural districts in England was that which has since been called, with a mixture of compassion and contempt, the Fens. For a considerable extent south and southwest of the Wash, wide rivers flowed between wooded islands, on whose rising grounds were erected the buildings suited to the character of the age and the locality; here a monastery surrounded by orchards and vineyards; there the dwellings of the superintendents of the fisheries, and elsewhere the lodges of the foresters in the service of king or abbot. Where dreary and sickly swamps afterwards extended from east to west, noble woods marked the undulations of the soil; and the waters which, some centuries later, bred ague and fever from their slime, then flowed and ebbed in their main channels, and were clear and wholesome in the stillest coves and recesses which afforded their tribute of eels to the monks, and permitted the formation of thick ice in its season.

A region so fair and fertile, lying near the east coast of our island, was, above every other, tempting to the Danes in their predatory visits of those days. Again and again did they burn the towns, pillage the estates, and lay waste the fields of the district: but the peculiar beauty of the scene was scarcely impaired. The orchards bloomed and bore fruit, the forests spread their leafy shade, and the waters abounded with fish, as if men were living in the peace of the religion they professed.

Thus it was when King Canute began his reign.

Grentebrige (since called Cambridge) had been a second time burned by the Danes in A.D. 1010; and it had scarcely begun to rise from its ruins when a great sea-flood, four years later, and then tempests and scarcity, discouraged the inhabitants from enterprise and industry. But the country districts showed scarcely any diminution of their beauty. The rising and the setting sun gleamed on the reaches of the river; and the stars were reflected in the still lagoons: the thickets on Thorn-ey (Thorn island) were blossomy and fragrant as ever in spring; and in autumn the heavy crops of ruddy apples on the orchard slopes promised an average brewing of cider. Under this beauty and promise, however, was hidden much hardship and hunger. Between the fear and the actual ravages of the Danes, the lands under tillage had been neglected or laid waste; and there was a scarcity, for years together, of wheat, barley, and beans. The former dwellers in our island, whether Saxons or Danes, had no notion of abstinence, except on fast days. Their capacity for taking food was beyond anything that modern habits can give an idea of; and they went on with their four ample meals a-day till their stores were exhausted, and they had to depend on their precarious fishing, fowling, and herb gathering.

This absence of prudence is easily accounted for when the insecurity of the times is considered. There was no inducement to form stores of grain or smoked meat when the "lord Danes" (as they were called by the people among whom they settled) entered every man's house, and used every man's possessions at their own pleasure. In districts further inland than the Danes were accustomed to sit down for a season, and where fish was less of a resource than on the coast, men might more safely venture to have full cellars and barns, and even to wear and use articles of gold and silver: but near the shores, the desire of every householder was to appear to have nothing in his house. In this, the Saxon householder was well supported by his wife and his retainers. From the owner himself down to his humblest herdsman, all had the knowledge that consequences so much worse than robbery of food and goods were to be dreaded when a

"lord Dane" had set his foot on any threshold, that all were willing to leave as little temptation as possible to the enemy to visit them, and therefore to make away rapidly with the family provisions, leaving the future to take care of itself.

Here and there an exception to such practice occurred: and stringent must be the reasons which could prevail against the sense of risks so fearful, and the natural tendency to improvidence which belonged to the times.

Merdhin, a farmer who lived in a half-cleared nook of Thorn-ey, and his wife Hildelitha, could not look on their young children, in times of threatened scarcity, without anxious thought how they were to be fed till the next harvest. Such provision as could be made without peril was made, of course. Everybody having a cow that could in any manner keep one — the numerous fasts requiring that all good Christians should command a milk diet—Merdhin had his cows grazing in the wood; not belled, lest the sound should attract any foe, but watched by some of the household. In the wood was also some poultry; and the children were early taught to go discreetly to work about feeding the fowls in a certain spot in the thicket, that they might have only a certain space to search for eggs. A herd of swine under the oaks was a matter of course. But out of the covert, little was to be seen. The hollowed blocks of wood in which the bees used to build were tumbled together on the south bank where they once stood in a row. The barn doors stood wide—a small heap of unthreshed barley in one corner, and a few beans in another, being all that remained from the last harvest. Within the house, a hard cheese or two, and some salted pork, hanging from the rafters, were all the provision that met the eye of chance visitors. And when any party of travellers entered, and made suspicious inquiries how the household lived, they were shown the storehouse, where there was more salted pork and more hard cheese, and were told that eels and herbs all the year round, and herrings and crabs in their season, with an occasional porpoise, made out the family diet when the grain was all gone.

To dwellers in the house, however, it appeared very

doubtful when the grain really was all gone. No one made very close inquiry; for all were willing that the young children of the family should be seen eating barley cake, or even occasionally wheaten bread, while the elder members were satisfying their hunger with hard pease, or insipid herbs. There might be some who understood the mystery; but they were discreet.

One winter night, Merdhin and his wife had remained up till they believed every member of their household to be asleep; and then they arose in silence from the fireside, and went about what was evidently preconcerted business. Hildelitha fetched and lighted the household lantern, a ponderous affair, though somewhat simplified from that which good King Alfred had invented, to save his four-hour candles from flaring and wasting. Merdhin meanwhile softly opened the door; and forth they went to a little stone-paved yard belonging to the neat-herd's hut, two hundred yards behind the family dwelling. They knew the neat-herd to be absent, he having gone to help the shepherd of the neighbouring monastery to secure his flock from the wolves, which were now becoming audacious through hunger, and dangerous to all animals that were abroad at night. As the wintry wind came from the opposite shore to set the leafless trees rustling in the thicket, it brought to Hildelitha's watchful ears the occasional bark of a dog; and a gleam from a far-off shepherd's fire now and then flickered for an instant on the ice which lay broad and still in the starlight.

Her husband calling to her to give him light, she stooped down within the low inclosure, so shading the lantern with her woollen garment as that the light should fall only on the spot before which her husband was kneeling.

With an iron bar he raised an oblong stone, and looked down into a hole thus disclosed.

"All safe!" he whispered. "Now for the other!"

He removed a second stone, and smiled at the sight of the goodly wheat which lay heaped in the little pit before them. It had been parched, to prevent its sprouting in damp, or being spoiled by frost. It looked ready for the handmill and the girdle-plate; and Merdhin ladled out

with great alacrity a sufficient quantity for the night's cooking.

"Are you not hungry already?" said he to his wife. "Does not the thought of a steaming cake warm one, even in this cutting wind? You will be hungry enough by the time you have done grinding and cooking, for you ate at supper no more than might serve as a pretence. I, for my part, supped as well as if I had expected some Lord Dane to step in between us and our baking."

"Hush!" whispered the timid wife. "Speak of anybody rather than those whose ears are everywhere."

"They should have been cropped long ago," said the husband, lowering his voice to a whisper, however. "And they would have been, if we had had any one but the Unready over us. And the time may come yet, if—"

He paused, and shovelled out one more bowlful of the grain.

"No, no," said Hildelitha. "The king is good now: he is kind and just—not like a Dane. Let us hope our wars and our changes are over."

"I said 'if,'" replied Merdhin, as he rose to shift and replace the stone. "I was thinking how soon Canute would be tired of pretending that the Danish raven is no raven but a dove. What say you?"

"I say that I can think of nothing now but how my poor little Tecla will put out her hand for her breakfast in the morning when she sees what I bring her. I could not sup to-night for thinking of it."

"It was that very thought that made me sup so heartily," said Merdhin. "And now home, and to work!"

And he was about to replace the second stone, when a voice behind him said,—

"Not so fast, friend! Empty your hoard while you have the lid up."

Merdhin snatched the lantern from his wife, and turned the light in the direction of the voice. Four faces, yellow in the dim gleam, appeared above the wall. All were smiling; but not so as to bring answering smiles.

"You see," said one of the strangers, "that we are double your number: moreover we have not supped—well or ill. So out with more of your good wheat."

"The whole and no less," exclaimed another, leaping the wall.

Merdhin seized him by the throat: but his grasp was loosened in an instant by many hands.

"O master!" cried the trembling neat-herd, "I did not bring these strangers here of my own accord. They carried me off, to show them where I lived. O my lords!" turning to the strangers, "I did not know of any grain hidden here."

"No, or there would have been less by the measure of your appetite," observed one of the intruders.

The inferior men of the party would have compelled Merdhin to work as their servant in emptying his own stores: but their leader was more politic and better mannered. He ordered one of his followers and the herdsman to assist the host, and even took a turn at the work himself. Meantime, two more attended Hildelitha home, to see that a good fire was prepared for cooking, and that she disturbed none of the household who could interfere with the comfort of the strangers.

A merry night they made of it: and an anxious night it was to the farmer and his family. The children trembled in their beds as the laughter and singing grew louder. The servants peeped in and peeped down through crevices in the wooden walls and ceiling: but they could not get a word with their master, who found himself a prisoner in his own hall: nor could they concert any effectual scheme of rescue or revenge among themselves. There were no neighbours within the reach of many hours, except the monks, who could do no good in such a case. And there was nothing in the conduct of the strangers to rouse such anger as could defy all consequences. Hildelitha was treated with courtesy, and thanked for her exertions: and the host's health was pledged in his own ale and mead, whether or not he chose to return the greeting.

In the morning, when the leader of the party roused himself from the short sleep he had taken with his head on the board, he called for water, dashed it over his head and face till he was thoroughly awakened and cooled, ordered a clearance of all signs of revelry in the apartment, looking abroad meantime at the faint light which was

breaking in the east, and then proceeded to hold a kind of court of his followers, over which he himself presided.

He caused Merdhin and his wife to be placed at the foot of what was now, in appearance, a judicial board.

"Do you know who we are?" was his first question to Merdhin.

"No: nor by what right you are here," the host roughly replied.

His wife laid her hand on his arm, and some members of the mock court began to look fierce.

"You ask only what I was about to explain to you," said the leader, courteously. "I am Hagen the Dane, a commissioner from the king, sent into these parts with my followers, to prepare for the making a great causeway from Peterborough through the low grounds; a work which shows the love of the king towards his subjects in this region, and which will prove to all men, a thousand years hence, the care of King Canute for his people."

Hagen's followers raised a shout: and when the noise had subsided, Merdhin exclaimed,—

"So it is true! A causeway complete from Peterborough, through those wide marshes! It will be a noble work, and a blessing to the country."

"And while the king is creating blessings for your country, you have not common hospitality to spare for his servants. You would have offered his commissioner nothing better than salt beef and herbs, with perhaps some dry pease, while you had a store of fine wheat for yourselves. Can you pretend to say that you would have given me any better food than you gave to some wayfarers last week, if I had not come down upon you in the night?"

"We should not," replied Hildelitha. "The wheat was kept for our young children. As we have seen this last night, hungry travellers may eat at a meal what would serve our children's needs till the spring fishing and the early greens."

Her voice trembled as she spoke. Hagen knew that this was not from fear, but from the thought of her children's needs.

"It must not be forgotten," said he, "that your

children's children will have reason to bless the errand on which we come. And I must make it understood through all the region that every possible help and comfort is to be afforded to the king's messengers, whenever they bring into it the honour of their presence. An example must be made of such inhospitality as yours."

"By what law?" asked Merdhin.

"I will tell you when you tell me by what law the king is obliged to give you a road through the marshes. But if you like, your penalty shall go under the name of service to the work. The wolves—"

"The wolves!" faintly exclaimed Hildelitha.

"The wolves are a hindrance to us," continued Hagen; "the survey in the marshy parts ought to be finished while the ice is hard: but packs of wolves beset us, and compel us to keep together in the day-time, and to return long distances every night. I have therefore determined that the penalty of each offence that comes under my eye shall be paid in wolves' tongues. You will therefore go out, within this hour, against the wolves, and deliver to me, within six weeks from this day, six score of wolves' tongues."

Merdhin flushed to the temples as he cried, "That is the punishment of the vilest criminals in our country;—of those," he continued, looking fiercely round upon his oppressors, "who have robbed a friendly host, or murdered a weary traveller, or eaten the bread of young children. Such are the men," he cried, with raised voice and daring eye,—"such are the men that ought to be sent out for wolves' tongues, and not I who have a home and family to protect from such ruffians as I have said."

Again Hildelitha laid her hand on his arm. "Perhaps," said she, "my lord was not aware that the punishment is base among Saxons. He will not now press it."

"Call it service to the king's good work," said Hagen. "As for your home and family, the women and children shall be protected under the eye of the monks of Peterborough: and there, by the way, they will get good barley meal, if they cannot have such fine wheat as at home. Your house shall be under my own care. It will suit me

well as an abode for a little time to come; and you may be sure of its safety while it has to shelter me."

The cool decision with which he spoke annihilated all hope of change of purpose. Hildelitha threw her arms round her husband's neck, in order to whisper in his ear,—

"Fly! Do not meet the wolves. Fly so far that the king may never be able to find you. Then we may meet again some day: but we never, never shall, if you go out at night against the wolves. Do not fear for us. I will take care of the children, in some way; and the good monks—"

"One thing more," said the dreaded voice of the commissioner, whose eye had been upon them: "I cannot spare men to guard you, and see you execute your task: and for that reason it is that I hold your wife and children as hostages—as hostages," he repeated with emphasis, knowing the unspeakable terror of that word wherever Canute's former treatment of Saxon hostages had been heard of. "Moreover," continued he, "it will be required of you to deliver weekly, in the court yard at Peterborough, whatever of your tale you have been able to collect. Thus, your wife will be assured of your safety from week to week, and you of her's. Now, order out your horses for your wife and children, and any female attendant that she may choose to take with her: and I will myself be her escort, and see her within the gates. If you wish to witness our departure, be quick; for by sunrise you must yourself be on your way."

He gave orders that Merdhin should be furnished with such arms, food, clothing for warmth or defence, and such moderate supply of money as he might desire; and that one attendant, armed enough for self-defence, should be permitted to accompany him, to carry his stores, serve as his companion in his wanderings, and as a messenger in case of distress.

"Think not of us," said Hildelitha, as her husband put one of the children into her arms, after she had mounted her horse. "The good monks will pray for you. And O! my husband, fly!" she whispered. "We shall be with the holy monks; so think not of us."

"I shall think of my work," he replied aloud. "I shall give my whole mind to my errand, and shorten it. Ay!" he continued in a lowered tone, "I know how to shorten it. If I tell myself that I hear a Danish hail in every bark, and that I see a young lord Dane in every whelp, I shall not be long in getting my six score."

Whether these words had not been overheard by the commissioner was an anxious doubt to Hildelitha. His parting words on turning from the door, were ominous.

"Remember, Merdhin, the Danish raven is in every wood."

## CHAPTER II

### NIGHT BY THE FOLD

When the sun rose above the parapet of clouds on the horizon, and cast a dim gleam on the ice of the eastern lagoon, Merdhin was striding along through the paths of the wood, in such a fever of mind that his attendant was hardly sorry to be unable to keep up with him. Yet the man was chidden, as often as he came within hearing, for not walking nimbly while his master's affairs were so pressing. He might have pleaded his burden: but he ventured only to repeat that the way to the sheep-fold lay so nearly straight that it would be hard to miss it; and that he would get there himself as soon as his legs would take him. Merdhin at last was struck with the sight of the load the man was carrying. He took from him the leathern sack of food, and the little cask of strong ale, and flung them over each shoulder, pursuing his way as fast as ever under the added burden.

The attendant was the neat-herd, chosen because he had come this way yesterday, and could most easily bring his master to the spot where the sheep of the monks of Thorn-ey were at present folded.

That spot was a small island, green at all seasons, and chosen as the fold in the severest part of every winter, because it could be most easily defended from wild animals. Merdhin found two of the servants of the monastery engaged now in this work of defence, while the shepherd was milking two ewes which had already dropped their lambs, and were sheltered in the small hut in which he lived. The embers of the night fires kindled on the ice were still alight: and afar off might be seen the retreating figures of the watchers who were returning to the monastery, on the arrival of the two who were supplying their places.

The chief business of the watchers was to keep clear of

new ice a channel cut all round the little island, and to maintain the night fires. The most rapid freezing took place just before sunrise; and as there was, at this severe season, no security against the return of the disappointed and famished animals of prey at any hour, the ice was as diligently broken in the morning as at sundown. The men were so busy with their iron-pointed staves, driving, breaking, and drowning the young ice, that they did not hear Merdhin's hail. When they perceived him at last, and his attendant in the rear, they shouted joyous thanks for such a reinforcement, and pushed out a plank, by way of bridge across the channel.

When Merdhin's figure darkened the door of the hut, the shepherd rose surprised, and forgot his complaining ewe. He pushed back his woollen hood, and gazed in the face of the neighbour who had thus condescended to visit him.

"Sit down again, friend," said Merdhin. "Who need ever stand before one condemned to collect wolves' tongues?"

"It was a croaking raven that spoke that sentence on you," said one of the convent servants.

"Hush!" said the other. "The king is a good king to good Christians: and we are told to return him kind words for kind deeds."

"There is no talking of kind deeds to-day before Merdhin," replied the first. "And it is a comfort to be in a place where one may curse the enemy that one may not speak against at home. For my part . . ."

"No cursing!" exclaimed Merdhin, imperiously. "That is, curse in your heart, if you will: but I want no useless words. My business presses."

"The wolves came from yonder quarter in troops last night," said the shepherd, with an intuitive sense of Merdhin's wishes. "Some, a good many, were heard on every hand; but the greatest number came this way, I fancy from the hills, off there."

"Came! but which way did they go? that concerns me most. I want to be up with them."

"Better wait them here to-night. You never saw such packs . . ."

"I cannot wait," said Merdhin.

"There is enough to do meantime — a good day's work," said the sensible shepherd. "A dozen men would not be too many to make the wolf-pits that we could use to-night."

"I will do the work of a dozen," replied Merdhin. "Where should your wolf-pits be? You know the ground."

"Ay, and the enemy. No councillor like a shepherd when you are going to war with wolves. But what to do for tools!"

The neat-herd and one of the convent servants set off with alacrity to borrow tools, and, if possible, men for what might truly be called the service of the whole district. Sudden as was the call, enough came to make large preparation for the nightly attack, though it was necessary for them to depart homewards before dark, to avoid encountering the enemy by the way.

Broad spaces were cut in the ice, on that side of the islet where the waters were shallow enough to admit of the finding of the drowned wolves on the morrow, the object being, not merely to destroy them, but to obtain their tongues. These holes were sufficiently disguised by a covering of powdered ice, strewed on a surface of osiers which would give way under the tread of a cat. It was only on a calm day that this kind of trap could be prepared; for a gust of wind was enough to lay it open. The blood of a sheep was dropped from some distance towards each trap, and plentifully sprinkled on the powdered ice; while between the trap and the inner channel lay a piece of flesh for the bait. On the opposite side of the islet was a land trap. A deep pit was dug the whole width of the point of land which lay between the fold and the ice. Sharp stakes were fixed, points upward, in the bottom; and in the midst, and at some distance from each other, were erected tall poles, each with a flesh bait dangling from the top. To this pit there was also an osier covering, which was strewed with grass and rushes for disguise.

The last pole with its bait was reared just as the sun went down behind the leafless western woods. Merdhin, with heated face and brow, was toiling as if a life depended

on the full use of every minute of daylight. When the last handful of grass was strewn, he did not give himself a moment's breathing-time, but turned to prepare his arms.

His attendant proposed to serve out to him the ale he had already refused three or four times.

"Not yet," he replied impatiently. "There is only the dusk left for arming and all else. Not a spark of light must we have anywhere but from the sky; and there is too little left of that."

"No fire!" exclaimed two or three voices.

"No fire will I permit, nor candle. We want to bring the wolves, not to keep them off."

"But within the hut . . ."

"The hut has chinks. Not a word more! Any one who fears to watch a night in the dark may go—now, while he can see his way."

No one went: but there was a murmur that they should be found stiff corpses in the morning.

"Are you afraid of being frozen?" said Merdhin, dashing the perspiration from his brow.

"Excuse them!" said the shepherd. "You have a fire burning within, and . . ."

"True, true!" and Merdhin eagerly turned his face to meet a faint breath of night wind, which seemed more welcome to him than any other possible refreshment. His irritation subsided at once. For an instant he stood with his ear turned in the direction of that one visiting breath, and then he looked towards the sheep. There was a stir and crowding together in the fold, and next, in consequence, a bleating from the ewes within the hut, followed by that of their lambs.

"You heard a bark?" inquired the shepherd. "I thought no ear was readier than mine to catch a wolf's bark."

"They are coming," said Merdhin. "Let those who fear the cold drink up my ale: and if that does not warm them, they may huddle with the sheep. And now silence! and all go within the hut till utter dark."

The shepherd however softened some of the discontent of his fellow-watchers by telling them that he should keep a light burning in his lantern, turning the open side

towards the wall in a corner of the hut. There would be no light that could scare a mouse: and it was as well to be prepared for accidents.

The first hour after dark was such an exciting one that those within the hut thought but little of meat or drink. As for Merdhin, no one knew where he was; and none wished to go out to see, so fearfully as the clamour of the wolves seemed to be closing in upon them. When the moon rose, the shepherd went forth to look to his fold, where, of course, his flock were in the extremity of terror, and even the dogs appeared disconcerted at the absence of the fires which were their wonted protection.

The moonlight disclosed the figure of Merdhin, standing, javelin in hand, on the brink of the pit. He pointed to three wolves which he had speared, on their having either leaped the chasm or scrambled out of it. From the pit issued such a yelping and baying, that the men could hardly make one another hear. But the shepherd was rather dismayed that any had passed, and said that he and his comrades must come out and mount guard.

"Leave it to me," said Merdhin. "They will be afraid of the cold. Here is work enough to keep us warm though." And he pointed with his weapon to where more and more wolves were trooping towards the islet.

Out came the watchers, on summons, armed with axe, mallet, spade, or other tool. Only two or three more wolves cleared the pit; and they were at once struck down. After a time, the alarm spread among those who were still on the outer ice, and they turned tail. Desperate as was their hunger, they slunk away, finding this islet better guarded than by such fires as were kindled round every other fold in the region.

Merdhin did not relax his watch till daylight. The rest of the party had quietly lighted a fire within the hut, after stopping up as many chinks as they could. They had supped and slept, and come forth, yawning, to offer their help, by the time Merdhin had speared all the wolves in the pit which remained alive, and was fishing up one of the few which might be seen drowned under the ice holes.

These were presently drawn up, and deprived of their

tongues, which Merdhin carefully deposited in a leathern sack. When every slaughtered wolf had given up its tongue, the number was found to be ten.

"That will be great news at home," exclaimed one of the convent servants. "I doubt whether such a thing was ever heard of in these parts as so many being taken in one night."

"There is seldom such an onset, on either side," observed the shepherd. "The hungry brutes have met their match in an angry man; and the frost that pinched their noses, in the fire that burns in his heart. See, what is he doing now? Tying stones round their necks to sink the carcases in the deep channel. Leave that to us, master," he said. "That is work for us to do—getting rid of the carrion. Now is your time for food and rest within; a little of each, to serve you till you reach the convent, which will, I suppose, be your next stage."

But Merdhin continued his toil, only stopping an instant to learn whether he would not be permitted to try another night's warfare on the islet.

"We should be thankful enough, for the flock's sake," replied the shepherd, "if the wolves were likely to come. But the news has spread among them, for this time: and we must have a new frost, or a washing rain before they will be caught in our pit again."

"Are you sure of that? Then I must be off. If they will not come to me to-night, I will go to them."

"Go to them!"

"Yes: and bring them again to me—again within reach of my long javelin. I will get into a tree at sundown, and leave a flesh bait at the foot; and they will be howling all about me by the time the moon is up."

"O! master: and am I to get into a tree?" exclaimed the neat-herd. "If I must, let it be the same tree, and as high up as I can climb."

"No—you deserve rest on a pallet this night. Shift for yourself: only leave me a barley cake and a flask of ale, and what arms I can carry. And that sack. Let no one touch that sack," he cried, as his attendant was taking it up.

"It would be safe enough with me, master," said the man, reproachfully.

"True — you are not degraded to the collecting of wolves' tongues," muttered Merdhin.

"To my mind there is something good in the business —ay, and something bold and fine, and not degrading at all," the shepherd ventured to say. "As I have seen it to-night, a man so hardy, and so devoted to his work that he forgot meat, drink, and fire, and saved many an innocent sheep, no doubt, and gained the thanks of the good monks—in such a way of doing the business, I see nothing of disgrace."

"Ah! but its being a penalty!" replied Merdhin, in a softened tone.

"And of whose laying on?" asked the shepherd. "If it be true that certain people's favours are injuries, may we not take their insults for compliments?"

"That was the way, as father Edmund preached," declared the convent servant, "that St. Adelm thought and spoke, when the heathens put him in the stocks and whipped him. 'Flog away!' said he; 'every stripe puts a flash of light into my crown.' So, when our enemy, who are worse than heathens . . ."

"Hush! hush!" said Merdhin. "Whatever they are, I am no saint. I have not even meekness enough to take comfort from such as you,—lowered as I am."

And he turned away to finish his work of disposing of the carcases. Perhaps, however, he was the better for the train of thoughts awakened in him by the mention of a saint and a holy monk; for he bade the shepherd farewell with gentleness, and thanked the convent servants with courtesy for their assistance through the preceding day and night.

"There goes a ruined man!" thought the shepherd, as he watched Merdhin's progress over the ice towards the western woods. "He may silence the barking wolves, but he will never gather quiet thoughts about him again. He may carry home his wife and children in safety and honour, as far as men see: but he will never enjoy his hearth again. As sure as the raven has stooped to brush any man's head with her lightest feather, that man is scathed as if she carried lightning in her wings."

## CHAPTER III

### TRESPASS

As Merdhin proceeded on his way, he was struck with the change in the weather, and in the aspect of the country. He left behind him every wide expanse of waters, saw fewer lagoons, observed the rivers assume more of the appearance of streams running between well-defined banks, and was surprised to find, first the centre, and then the whole, free of ice, except in shallow bays and coves. The sun shone out, and the rime on the grass and on the sprays of every tree became transformed to glittering dew-drops.

Merdhin turned from the river, in order to penetrate the woodland, believing that the wolves would be most likely to congregate in the heart of the forest, under whose covert the beasts of chase had no doubt already brought forth some of their young. No farms, with their cattle and sheep folds, were to be seen in the depths of forest regions; and the wildest thickets were therefore the most probable resort of beasts of prey. Merdhin's mood also disposed him to the choice of such a scene for his next exploit. He wished to avoid men, to bury himself and his mortifications in the woods: and he marched on, as if he left foes behind him.

By mid-day, however, his pace relaxed; and in the afternoon, he found himself actually loitering. The almost forgotten charms of the deep woodland penetrated and calmed his spirit. The sunshine slanted down upon the mossy roots of the old oaks, and the smooth, pillar-like stems of the beech. The rustling of the leaves under foot pleased his ear as he walked; and when he stood still, he heard the whispering of the topmost boughs, as the soft south wind passed through them. He believed that he caught, at one instant, the coo of a wood pigeon, the earliest of the year. In truth, there was one spot which

looked and felt like spring, a nook, clear of trees, but sheltered by a thick growth of them. Here he found a single sorrel leaf, peeping out from the root of an oak: and a squirrel put forth its nose from its hole to try the warmth of the sun. Such a transition from winter to spring, between morning and night, was not so surprising to Merdhin as it might now be to inhabitants of the same region. In countries as little cleared, and as thinly inhabited as these levels then were, the difference of a zone of the globe may now be experienced between a watery shore and a thick forest district, only a few miles inland.

Merdhin did not enjoy the change the less for not being surprised at it. A glow of comfort seemed to pass through his soul, as well as his limbs. After loitering some time in this nook, he asked himself why he should go further. There was no more likely spot for the forest animals to seek, or the wolves to follow them to.

He climbed the tallest tree he could find; and as he swung in the top, he felt some of the genial spirit of boyhood return to him.

Not a dwelling could he see, far or near. The sun was low above the tree tops to the west; and it was certainly the time when the cows should be going homewards, and the sheep be penned, and the swine collected for their night-feed; but neither cow bell, nor bleat, nor grunt could he hear. Again his spirits rose with the conviction that he was indeed alone in the good old British forest. He did not forget the commissioner's warning that the Danish raven was in the depth of every wood he could enter. He knew this only too well by the brooding of the dark bird at his heart: but he bade it defiance, and sat on his perch, looking abroad with a free eye and a lightened spirit.

When the waters on the eastern horizon began to look their greyest and coldest, and the last yellow haze of the day shrouded the sun and the woods to the west, he came down, to make preparations for the night before the night should come. He left up in the tree his sheaf of short javelins (after putting two or three into his girdle), his sack of wolves' tongues, and his leathern night-cloak;

for this was the tree he chose for his station, standing, as it did, on the verge of the clear space, and having a slight rise at its foot, which would facilitate the access of as many wolves as might choose to come and bay at him.

When he was half-way down, he paused and remained quiet. A wild sow, with her litter of very young pigs, was busy under the trees, rooting out the beech nuts, acorns, and dried grass which the squirrels and mice had buried in their winter holes. Merdhin had begun to feel hungry some time before; and now the sight of the young swine, and good spirits together, made him long for a hearty supper.

"That is a young sow," thought he. "Under a year, certainly; and she has farrowed early; and every pig of all that litter must be a delicate morsel. One, two—fifteen in all. I don't know whose chase this is: but whosever it be, I may fairly have a supper out of it, for my service against the wolves. And out of all the troops of swine in this solitude, no one will be the worse for sparing me one little pig. And if it belongs to a lord Dane, as it no doubt does, he has no more right to it than I. And, in return for the hospitality that I myself have given to Danes, it is too contemptible a trifle to be worth a thought. And, above all, they have treated me in such a way that I am much disposed to do what I please, for the rest of my life, without minding any of them, so as not to put Hildelitha and the children into any danger."

When he had thus, with the speed of thought, put away one bad reason by bringing in another, till mere will remained, he cast a javelin, and struck down a delicate young grunter, just such an one as the abbot at Thorn-ey would relish for supper, after a cold pilgrimage to meet his brother of Peterborough. In the midst of the outcry of sow and unhurt pigs, Merdhin slid down from his tree, and despatched the little creature with his knife.

"Its offal will be good bait for the wolves," said he to himself: "and that is another reason for my making free. And now—"

But at this moment he heard a terrific rushing through the thicket. He at once apprehended the approach of the boar, and would have made for the tree; but there

was no time. Once he saved himself by a spring to one side: but the beast wheeled round to attack him again, and it was well that he had left his spear within reach. He snatched it, and drove it at random. Happily it entered the neck; and the boar swerved just so much as that one of its tusks grazed Merdhin's high leathern hose, instead of tearing the flesh of his thigh. Again the animal turned upon him; but with less force: and it was easy first to evade him, and then to give him a fatal stroke, by plunging the knife into the back of the neck.

"I did not think to have been driven on by the pig to kill the boar," thought Merdhin, "and in a domain that I know nothing about. But it is so much more bait for the wolves. I must make haste with my supper, while the light lasts; for there is scent enough now in this nook to bring all the beasts of prey in the forest about me."

He quickly gathered sufficient wood to make a glowing fire in the midst of the space: and he broiled some of the tender joints of his pig, listening the while to catch the first tokens of any movement in the forest.

"Already!" thought he, as a distant bark came on the wind. "The wolves grudge me my supper, after I have spread so good an one for them. I must carry my feast up, and eat it on my perch. If I make haste it will not be quite cold."

He did make haste; and his sack, his arms, his supper, and himself, were all safely lodged forty feet from the ground before any enemy appeared.

When the enemy appeared, it was not in the shape of wolves, but of a man with a dog. Their entrance upon the scene was a spectacle which Merdhin himself could not help enjoying, though it foreboded evil and danger to himself. The dog sprang from the thicket, almost into the still smoking fire, and then turned his eye upon his master's, with a speaking expression of inquiry what was next to be done. His master looked round him, stirred the embers, as if expecting to turn up the secret from among them, examined the slain boar, cast a sharp glance into the neighbouring bushes, and then lifted his cow-horn to his lips, and blew his loudest blast. A response came from a distance; and then another; and the

keeper blew another blast immediately under the tree where Merdhin sat.

"I wonder," thought Merdhin, "whether they will find out where the offender hides till the wolves come to tell them. One way or another, they will soon be about me; and then my fate will depend on whether this chase belongs to a Lord Dane, or to one of my own people."

It was the dog who discovered the intruder. He was leaping up against the tree when the other keepers, to the number of three or four, appeared from the thickets.

In answer to their demand that he would come down, Merdhin told his story, explaining that he was not in hiding, but placed so as best to make war against the wolves. He declared himself ready to answer for what he had done, both to the forest authorities, and to his own bail. And declaring that he knew not where he was, he inquired who were the forest authorities in this case.

He had been right in his apprehension of having offended a Lord Dane. This was one of the royal forests, and he had helped himself to a king's pig and slain a king's boar.

On hearing this, Merdhin resolved not to come down. He declared his intention of remaining where he was till he had finished his business with the wolves; and warned the keepers of the stock of weapons that he had with him, recommending them to wait till he should descend of his own accord.

By this time it was so nearly dark that the keepers could not see Merdhin, though their figures were sufficiently visible to him as they moved in the open space. Two of them rekindled the fire, while the other two kept watch at the foot of the tree. They could not but laugh when Merdhin complained of the fire, as sure to defeat his business with the wolves. They told him that he should have a larger fire to complain of presently, as they meant to kindle one round his tree, and burn it, or smoke him down, if he did not surrender himself immediately. He coolly warned them of the penalties for injuring the king's woodland, by fire or unauthorised felling; and repeated that he would come down when his work was finished, and not before.

He was presently aware that his foes were climbing the tree. While they were placing their feet on the lower branches, he did what he had early determined on. He climbed a little higher, and then along a branch to where the stout limb of a neighbouring oak extended within his grasp: upon this he sprang, leaving all his chattels behind him, except the knife, and such javelins as he could carry in his girdle. The oak yielded so little to his spring and weight as not to give the alarm to his foes, each of whom was making his own rustling among the wintry boughs; and Merdhin had dropped down into the thicket, leaped out into a glade on the other side, and fled some way with the course of the wind, before his foes had satisfied themselves that he was not on his first perch.

Presently the breeze brought him tidings from behind, that there was enough for men and dogs to do in keeping off the hungry beasts of prey which were allured by the scent of the carcases he had slain for them. He had now only to beware of brute enemies; and he pursued his way diligently till he reached in the morning an open road, by which he travelled to the abode of one of his bail, with whom he could consult, in honour and confidence, as to what should be his next proceeding.

## CHAPTER IV

### SURRENDER BY BAIL

It was to the farm of his friend and fellow-freeman, Willebrod, that Merdhin repaired in his new distress. He would, the day before, have gone far round to avoid the dwelling; but now there was a total change in his affairs, and in his feelings about them. Yesterday he was arbitrarily punished for an arbitrary offence, under a degrading sentence, for an act for which his bail were in no way responsible. To-day he had committed an offence recognised by the laws of his country, and his co-residents would be called on to produce him, or to suffer in his stead. Honour and social duty required that he should put himself in the power of some one of his bail; and he was not sorry that it was so; for he needed to open his burdened mind to a comrade who could sympathise in his troubles.

From a distance he saw Willebrod in his vineyard, overlooking his men as they loosened the soil round the roots of the vines. Merdhin waited as patiently as he could till the labourers went to their noonday meal, believing that their master would stay for a few minutes to examine their work. This happened as usual, and Merdhin showed himself from behind the fence of massive roots, so as to attract the notice of his friend.

"Merdhin! is that you?" exclaimed Willebrod, in some doubt; so haggard and worn were the face and figure of the wanderer.

"I hardly know!" replied Merdhin. "I feel as if I were not the same man as when we met last." And he put his hand to his head.

Willebrod observed that he supported himself by grasping the fence. The sight of him in this state—the strong and comely Merdhin so reduced—suggested the horrid fear common in those times.

"Where are Hildelitha and the children? for I see the Lord Danes have been upon you."

"My wife and little ones are with the good monks at Peterborough: I have reason to believe so."

"Christ be thanked! then all may be well. Tell me no more now. Follow me, and I will give you food and drink, and a place to sleep in. You want sleep, I see."

"But I have broken the laws."

"The very reason why you should sleep in my house, that I may the more readily produce you. Have you slain a foreigner?"

"No—no man; but the king's game."

"Well; tell me no more now, but come . . ."

"One thing more I must tell you. I was foully disgraced yesterday, by a vile sentence passed on me in my own house. I am to bring in tale of wolves' tongues, in the face of the holy monks of Peterborough."

Willebrod answered lightly; but the sudden flush of face and brow showed his sense of the indignity.

"The holy monks," said he, "know us better than any Dane. They will never take you or me for criminals, be assured. Do not stand here in the cold. Come to my chamber, the quietest place I have for you. There you shall eat first, and then sleep, and then you shall tell me whatever you please. Come, and I will wait on you myself."

It was past midnight when Merdhin awoke. His friend was watching beside the fire, and food and ale were on the table. In a low voice the host proposed that they should sup and converse, and then his guest should sleep again.

"Now tell me," said he, when Merdhin refused more ale, and the fire blazed up cheerily on being fed with a fresh log,—"tell me what your danger actually is. Do these keepers know who you are?"

"They never saw my face, but concealment is impossible, even if I wished it, which I do not."

"You have made up your mind to that?"

"I have. Some one will be seized for the offence. To show zeal for the king, they will lay hold of some one. That one and his friends will discover the real offender. You know my arms are left behind. They show me to

be a free man: and then, there is the sack with the wolves' tongues: and to no other man," and he covered his face with his hands as he spoke—" to no other man do those two things belong, such arms and such tribute!"

" The strongest reason for your delivering yourself up," said Willebrod calmly, " appears to me to be this—that you can use your privilege of a free man in obtaining your sentence from the king himself; and this will give us opportunity to make known to him his commissioner's conduct towards you."

" What then? Is he not himself a Dane? "

" Yes: but he is not altogether like other Danes. It is a favourite saying of his, ' I want no money raised by injustice.' Can he say less of any other form of tribute? And of the injustice he cannot make a moment's question."

" The weightiest reason with myself," said Merdhin, " is that my bail will be for ever liable for my fine, and much else, if I fly."

" Let us see what that would amount to," said Willebrod. " Some arangement might be made between you and us as to your property, if you wish to keep out of Danish hands altogether."

" My wife and children! " exclaimed Merdhin. " But for them, I would . . ."

" Better not tell me what you would do, lest you should still do it, and I be inquired of," said Willebrod. " I believe your offence will come under the head of stealing from the king; and your fine will then be ninefold compensation. Nine times the value of a boar or pig is not a very desperate fine. And then . . ."

" Ay! then there is also the offence of chasing on his lands without leave: though heaven knows it was the boar that chased me. But I cannot plead this to any purpose."

" Certainly, while the brute lies pierced by your spear, and no witness available."

" And the pig to witness against me."

" And the pig, as you say.—But I have been supposing you intending to confess or fly; there remains the method of the ordeal. If you put yourself in the way of arrest, and should be fortunate with the ordeal, you may save

your property, and escape. I would not say such a thing if I thought you a guilty man; but your supping off a wild animal is in my eyes an offence so small that you have fully expiated it already. You are hesitating, I see. Let not the thought of what you left in the tree hinder you. All evidence is as nothing before the decision of the ordeal: and if we could get it conducted here in Thorn-ey, our united interest with the monks . . ."

"No," interrupted Merdhin. "I have committed the legal offence, and, however small it may appear to you, I will bear the penalty."

"You will thereby keep the power of appeal to the king, and may get quit of the other sentence, as I said," replied Willebrod. "Yes, I believe that will be your wisest way. To-morrow, or as soon as we hear that you are accused, I will cause the bishop to be informed that I will produce you, on summons from him to the next gemot. And here you will remain, my friend, till your affair comes on."

"I would willingly, my comrade: but there is my week's tale to the commissioner to be provided. Here is nothing ready—my first night's gain gone—and in three days from this time I must appear with my tribute at Peterborough."

"Impossible! It cannot be done," decided Willebrod. "The commissioner's business must give way to the king's. He must wait,—if indeed we cannot baffle him altogether."

"But my family!"

"I will see to that. I shall have to send a messenger round to all your bail, to inform them that you are safe, and what course you intend to take. The same man—and I will send none but a trusty one—will make clear to the abbot, and to Hildelitha, and to the commissioner himself, that you must have time. Or, suppose you go yourself."

"No, I will not."

"You do not doubt our trusting you to appear on summons. You do not suppose I want to keep you as a prisoner here!"

"I know you well; it is not that," replied Merdhin.

"I will not go because the Danes would take the occasion of any failure to insult and degrade me before the face of the holy monks, and of my wife. For Hildelitha's sake I will not go."

"I believe you are right, comrade. Stay and repose yourself here. And now, to sleep!"

He compelled his guest to return to his bed, and lay down himself on a bearskin near the fire, which he fed so well that he needed little covering but his woollen cloak.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SWOOP OF THE RAVEN

A FEW days passed, and affairs were proceeding as the friends had anticipated. A messenger had been sent round among Merdhin's bail, with orders to call last at the monastery at Peterborough, and there deliver the excuses due for the failure of the first week's tribute, together with a token from the bishop and the bail that they required the presence of Merdhin in his own hundred, for some little time to come. The bishop's summons had been served, and Merdhin and his securities were to appear before the next gemot to answer the charge of his having chased the king's game in a royal forest, without authority. In the interval, Merdhin wrought in his friend's fields, and would not listen to Willebrod's urgent suggestions that he should go home, and see how his own land was faring. He felt that he had rather see it a waste in the end than put himself voluntarily in the way of its present occupants —the Danish superintendents of the new causeway. He found his best solace in toiling for Willebrod, and rarely looked off from his occupation, but when the tread of horses' feet, or the horn or shout wherewith wayfarers were compelled by law to authenticate themselves as travellers and not thieves, made him hasten into the road, to see if news of Hildelitha and his little ones was arriving.

The approach of a mule one day made him so look up. It was not the messenger, but Father Olaf, a monk from the next convent. As he passed, he said in answe to the obeisance of Merdhin, and then of Willebrod, "Follow me, my sons." At the door he dismounted in silence; and when he had taken his seat beside the fire, he desired that all should withdraw but the host and Merdhin. Both these anticipated something serious from his manner of proceeding; and it was a relief when he remarked that it was profitable to recite the writings of pious men, as the

beginning of intercourse, and he would therefore read for the private edification of his sons then present, some passages from a discourse of the reverend bishop Lupus, preached during the late reign. There was the more need, he observed, for such occasional reading, as this very sermon preached, not many years before, in open church, could now be only privately recited, and to trusty ears alone.

The hearers seated themselves near the monk, and he proceeded to read, in a subdued voice,—

"We perpetually pay them tribute, and they ravage us daily."

Merdhin and Willebrod looked at each other and at the reader, on becoming aware that his subject was a denunciation of the Danes. The reader did not look up from his scroll, but continued,—

"They ravage, burn, spoil and plunder, and carry off our property to their ships. Such is their successful valour, that one of them will in battle put ten of our men to flight."

"Nay—nay!" cried the listeners. Father Olaf continued with emphasis,—

"Two or three will drive a troop of captive Christians through the country from sea to sea. Very often they seize the wives and daughters of our thanes, and cruelly violate them before the great chieftain's face. The slave of yesterday becomes the master of his lord to-day, or he flies to the Vikingr, and seeks his owner's life in the earliest battle. Soldiers, famine, flames, and effusion of blood abound on every side. Theft and murder, pestilence, diseases, calumny, hatred and rapine dreadfully afflict us. Widows are frequently compelled into unjust marriages; many are reduced to penury and are pillaged. The poor men are sorely seduced, and cruelly betrayed, and, though innocent, are sold far out of this land to foreign slavery. Cradle children are made slaves out of this nation . . ."

The monk's voice here failed him, and he turned his face from the gaze of his hearers as he cleared his throat to proceed.

"Cradle children are made slaves out of this nation,

through an atrocious violation of the law for little stealings. The right of freedom is taken away: the rights of the servile are narrowed, and the right of charity is diminished. Freemen may not govern themselves, nor go where they wish, nor possess their own as they like."

A deep sigh from Merdhin here made the reader put down his scroll.

"These are the things," said the monk, "which made the wise Elfric write that we, with our living eyes, might look for doomsday, as the end of the world was surely very near. Since then, our affairs have improved somewhat. We have not, at present, open war; and whereas the Bishop Lupus says, further on, 'the clergy are robbed of their franchises, and stripped of all their comforts,' it is now very different: we having a pious king who duly favours religion in its establishments and in its ministers. But as for the rest—much remains still too true." And the monk sighed.

"What would you have us do?" asked Willebrod. A deadly sickness of the heart kept Merdhin silent.

"The most afflicted must endure with a godly patience," replied Father Olaf, looking full upon Merdhin; "and we must all be loyally thankful that we have a merciful king, whatever his servants may be and do; a king merciful and just, when we can but reach his ear."

"And how to reach his ear?" said Willebrod.

"That is what we have to consider," replied the monk, "for the case of my son here sorely craves justice and mercy. Strengthen your heart, my son, to hear the news. Your tale of wolves' tongues was not delivered, two days since; nor did you appear. Twenty-four hours' grace was allowed. At the end thereof, a Danish ship was sailing from the nearest point of the Deeps; your children were put on board as slaves . . ."

Merdhin bounded from his seat, and cried "And Hildelitha!"

"She had disappeared last night. Whether she had attempted to follow her children, or had escaped in the hope of finding you, could only be conjectured. But the impression in the convent was that she was not in the hands of any Danes."

Merdhin rushed from the room. After a moment's hesitation about intruding on his grief, Willebrod followed him. But it was too late. He had flung himself on the horse which, in such dwellings and such times, usually stood saddled for sudden flight, and galloped, bareheaded, towards the woods.

Messengers were sent after him, in vain. The next day, the horse returned alone, and was found at his stable door. From the saddle there dangled a wolf's head.

"See this token!" cried Willebrod to the monk, who had returned for tidings. "He lets us know by this that he 'bears the wolf's head.' Merdhin an outlaw!"

"An outlaw and marauder!" sighed Father Olaf, "as many of our best freemen have become when, as Lupus preached, the 'right of freemen is taken away.' But will he not come in to summons before the gemot, for his actual offence? Will his bail have to bear his penalty?"

"His estate will defray that: and if not, we will. But that Merdhin should become an outlaw!"

## CHAPTER VI

### KINGLY DUTY AND KINGLY SPORT

THE spring of this year opened early. One mild evening, a procession of boats passed near the shores of Thorn-ey; so near as to bring out the inhabitants of the farm-houses and cottages to see whether the voyagers were harmless or to be dreaded.

The first boat carried a flag which, as it floated on the wind, disclosed the Raven. But all dread vanished when it was clearly seen that the king himself was on board.

There he was, seated at the stern, and looking towards the land: and truly, the orchards on the slopes, already tinged with the pink and white of their opening blossoms, the deeper shades behind, and the convent roof and belfry rising amidst them—and all these reflected in the still waters beneath, made a picture on which the young king might gaze in hearty love of his new dominions. It was the convent bell tolling over the wide waters which had brought the little fleet so near; for Canute loved to hear the music of devotion at all times. As the chant of the evening service rose and fell on the wind, he made a signal to the rowers to slacken their speed; and forthwith the whole fleet became nearly motionless, scarcely disturbing, as they glided on, the shadows on the surface. The gaze of the king was fixed on the monastery. Only once he looked aside, and that was when, in a momentary interval of the music, a voice of lamentation was heard from the shore — a feeble woman's cry — which was drowned in the next swell of voices.

When the service was over, and the king had devoutly crossed himself, he hummed a few notes which were eagerly caught up by his crew. They joined voices heartily in singing the ballad composed by the king himself, the first stanza of which remains to us.

"Merry sung the monks in Ely,
When Cnute king rowed thereby.
Row, my knights, row near the land,
And hear we these monks' song."

Each boat's crew took up the succeeding stanza; and the king turned to listen. But between every verse was heard that cry on the island. When it occurred the third time, Canute started from his seat, shaded his eyes from the slanting rays of the setting sun, and gazed in upon the shore. He then signed to make for the land; and great was the commotion that ensued there.

The holy monks immediately issued from their gate, and hastened down to receive their guest, as they supposed the king meant to be. But Canute could not stop. He was to-morrow to survey the line proposed for his great new causeway, afterwards called the King's Delf, and in use to this day. He had in perfection the royal will and faculty of investigating every incident that befel within his observation, as well as a new-born benevolence, springing from prosperity, strengthening with peace and time, and contrasting strangely with the barbarity which seemed natural to him during the first years of his presence in England. He now stepped on shore, returned the greeting of the monks, declared that such a voice of woe as he had heard was, from any but a child, an unseemly accompaniment to a Christian song, and ordered that the sufferer, if a maniac, should be aided by holy prayers; and if not, should be conveyed in the last boat of his company, that he might inquire into the case at Peterborough.

"She is no maniac, unless grief be called, in its extremity, madness," said Father Olaf, breathless between his speed down hill and his eagerness to interest the king.

"You know the story," said Canute. "Room shall be made for you and her in the last boat—no, in the next boat to my own, if you will silence that cry: and before I sleep, your story shall be heard."

And the king re-embarked, leaving Father Olaf no more time than to entreat his abbot to send Willebrod after them with the utmost speed.

The king had supped, in the house reserved for his use

at Peterborough, and he was sitting down to a game at chequers with one of his knights when a sudden thought seemed to cross him.

"Kingly duty must come before sport," said he. On the word, the commissioner Hagen placed himself in full view, with a large black board, on which a sort of map was traced in chalk. The abbot of Peterborough called to his almoner to produce the king's alms-pouch. The ealdorman of the district declared himself ready with the record of the last Shire-gemot. Almost every one present was ready with some piece of "kingly duty" for his sovereign to do.

But the king took no notice of any of these preparations. He directed that Father Olaf and the complaining woman should be summoned to the next apartment, where he joined them, attended only by his chamberlain, who bore the silver lamp before him, and his chancellor, whose presence he rarely dispensed with on occasions of inquiry and appeal like the present. In a few minutes, one of the secretaries was called from among the company in the hall; and from this it was inferred by the courtiers that the game of chequers might wait a good while.

It was not long, however, before a sudden hush was caused by the opening of the door of the ante-chamber. The hangings, stiff with embroidery of silver and gold, were held aside by the chamberlain, and the king appeared.

"Some of this business," said he, "will not wait."

And he called on the commissioner, who stood forth—not without dread.

"I gave you a commission about my causeway," said the king. "I gave you none to interpret my laws, and to invent punishments for my people. I now deliver to you a new commission. Can you prophesy what it is?"

Hagen's countenance fell. He feared the terrible retribution of having to fulfil himself the sentence he had inflicted on Merdhin. But the king, whose faculty of reading the thoughts of his courtiers was known to all about him, continued,—

"The vile task of collecting wolves' tongues is one which is not, and shall not be, imposed on any free man; on any but criminals condemned to death."

Under the sense of relief, the commissioner loudly exclaimed,—

"Canute the King is the most just of kings."

"Hear then the new commission which my justice appoints you. Bring back the children of Merdhin, and place them yourself in the arms of their mother, in the presence of my lord abbot here."

"But the vessel may have sailed — must have sailed . . ."

"Then let another vessel sail after it. If the wind is fair for one, it is fair for both. You shall also cause Merdhin to be brought hither, with an observance of all the rights and dues of a free man."

"My king—he has fled no one knows where, for the offence of hunting in the royal forests."

"For his offence in the forest, he shall suffer according to law. That is an affair which you may leave to myself and his bail. Your affair is to find him, and bring him hither in safety. He is among the band of marauders that inhabit the forest near Crowland. Take what force is necessary; and remember I shall know how you use it. Take heed to this man's safety. You have shown small respect to the laws of this our new country; but by those laws I govern; and by them account must be rendered to me for the life of every free man—the king being every freeman's legal lord and patron. Now—begone!"

"Such is your royal pleasure!" replied the uneasy commissioner.

"It is: but not the whole of it. It is my pleasure also to find you some commission in Denmark, when this business is settled. I have sent home the greater part of my followers; and none shall remain who do not respect the laws of this island, and the rights of its people."

The king retired by one door, and Hagen by another, leaving the Saxon and Danish members of the court to vent to one another their enthusiasm for the king. They gave him, according to their respective methods of admiration, the titles by which he was celebrated in his own day and afterwards—the Brave, the Generous, the Pious, the Great.

Careless of the murmur of praise which he had left behind him, Canute sat in the antechamber, in consultation with his chancellor. The hardy young warrior's face was as grave, and from its earnestness, almost as reverend as that of his counsellor. The secretary sat in silence, awaiting orders or dismissal.

"I am satisfied," said the chancellor, in answer to a question from the king, "I am satisfied alike by the testimony of the wife, the monk Olaf, and the freeman Willebrod, that the new forest laws are not answerable for the flight and ruin of this man. He was prepared to obey the summons of the bishop; was awaiting the day in the house of one of his bail. And a man must be out of his senses who would go forth in winter and bear the wolf's head, from fear of a mere fine which he was well able to pay. It was oppression from a different quarter that drove him forth; and not our forest laws."

"It is well," said the king. "I would have those laws like all others, just; doing all the good possible, with the least hardship. On the one hand, the state of the country compels us to require that every freeman shall bear arms, and arm his dependents; and on the other, it is necessary to preserve landed estates from being infested by such armed men in pursuit of beasts of chase. It appeared to us that the due and best security would be given by declaring every possessor of land the possessor of whatever was upon it, to give or to keep at his pleasure: and therefore to punish any one who laid hands without leave on the trees of any woodland, or on any beast, bird or fish that dwells within the bounds of any estate. Does this ordinance appear to you as just as when it was made?"

"It does."

"And that the punishment should be what it is?"

"Why not? It is of the same nature as that appointed for other thefts and aggressions. The question which many ask is only whether it is not too light for the offence of chasing the king's game in the royal forests."

"That is no matter of doubt to me," replied the king. "The grass and trees and beasts of crown lands look like those of other lands; and my pleasure in hunting is like

that of my knights and officers: and what is protection enough for them is protection enough for me."

The chancellor smiled as he said, "Great is the humility of the king who speaks such words."

"No," replied the king, reprovingly. "You speak against your better knowledge. My office is sacred, and must be secured on the lives of other men, because the lives and welfare of other men depend on it. My person is sacred, and must be secured on the lives of other men, for the same reason. But my property and my pleasures are those of a noble among nobles; and . . ."

"A noble among nobles!" murmured the chancellor in devout admiration.

"Higher than other nobles only in this," pursued the king, "that I stand in the midst of them, and am naturally the point of appeal to the weak and the wretched, as in this case. A man round whom most of the weak gather for justice and protection becomes more powerful than those who are so resorted to by only one or two: but his power is thus enhanced merely in extent, not in kind. No more sacredness is given to his lands, and no greater value to his beasts of chase. The battle-field is my chase when I hunt as a king: and there it is death for any one to cross my path. When I sport in my own woodland, if any one come between me and the boar, he offends merely against the proprietor of the land."

"However it may be with your beasts, birds and fishes," observed the chancellor, "it is certain that your thoughts are kingly."

"And yours," said Canute, "are not faithful when you would darken my views of the law, instead of clearing them. It was yourself who informed me of the old law of the kingdoms on the mainland, on which I founded that of my new island."

The chancellor was glad to escape from his embarrassment by citing this same old law,—

"Cuique enim in proprio fundo quamlibet feram quoquo modo venari permissum."

"See then," said the king, rising, "that our intentions in making our forest law are fairly fulfilled, in the case of this man Merdhin, and every other accused of the

slaughter or pursuit of game on another man's land. I would fain pardon this Merdhin; but we must respect the law we made in deliberation. Never let it be said, however, that Canute the King bears harder than the law for offences done against Canute the hunter."

The king returned to the hall and his game at chequers, leaving his chancellor musing over the change wrought, and still working in him, by the leisure of peace and the possession of power.

"One man," thought the chancellor, "is quiet and moderate enough till heaven or hell gives him power to work his full will; and then he makes men groan under his scourge. Here is a man who lived among groans, as if they were music, wherever he went as a conqueror through this land: and now that he is as great as the sun in the sky, he moderates his flames as if his head were snowy with age, instead of golden with youth. He studies night and day to make wise laws for the people's rule, and sweet ballads for their holiday hours. His sternness is, in these days, not for Saxons, but for the most obsequious, of whatever race. Heaven, who sent him, knows best where this will end. Perhaps we may see the Brave and Great a weeping pilgrim, some day: or his sceptre may sprout into a saint's palm-rod before he dies."

## CHAPTER VII

### PENANCE AND PEACE

THE shepherd of the monastery was rarely wrong in his predictions; and it was some years before he was proved mistaken in having said that Merdhin could never again fully enjoy his home, or recover a tranquil mind. Merdhin's terrified children were restored to his arms; his wife's shaken spirits were calmed; his servants returned home; and the dwelling and fields looked much like themselves in the course of a season or two. Moreover, the commissioner Hagen had set sail for Denmark as soon as he had brought Merdhin to Peterborough; and every Dane in the region knew that no molestation was to be offered to the household of the farmer on Thorn-ey. But this outward tranquillity did not suffice to calm the tempest which that one shock had aroused.

Good Father Olaf, who watched over the family, observed that Merdhin was most happy when working out his fine, to repay his bail; and he took this hint in regard to the other offence which lay heavy on the man's conscience, his having joined the band of marauders in the forest. While his heart bled with compassion for the despair which had prompted that step—one very common in those days—the monk treated it as a solemn sin, requiring a great penance, well knowing that the larger the penance the greater was the chance of peace at the end of it. He therefore appointed to his penitent a now incredible amount of repetition of prayers and psalms. But, better than this, he recited to him, in the language of the church, the acts for which he might commute the appointed penance.

"He may repair churches where he can, and make folkways, with bridges over deep waters, and over miry places; and let him assist poor men's widows, and stepchildren, and foreigners. He may free his own slaves,

and redeem the liberty of those of other masters, and especially the poor captives of war: and let him feed the needy, and house them, clothe and warm them, and give them bathing and beds."

Here was scope for the restless man; and ere long there was not a miry way that was not paved, nor a brook that was not bridged, within some miles of his dwelling; and he made footpaths for wayfarers through his own and the convent woodland. And when King Canute went on his long pilgrimage to Rome, Merdhin prayed loyally for his safety every day. And when the king's public letter, addressed to the whole of his English subjects, was read in the churches, preparatory to his return, Merdhin committed to memory as much of it as follows, and solaced himself with repeating it at his toil.

"And now, therefore, be it known to you all that I have dedicated my life to God, to govern my kingdoms with justice, and to observe the right in all things. If, in the time that is past, and in the violence and carelessness of youth, I have violated justice, it is my intention, by the help of God, to make full compensation. Therefore I beg and command those unto whom I have entrusted the government, as they wish to preserve my good-will, and save their own souls, to do no injustice either to rich or poor. Let those who are noble, and those who are not, equally obtain their rights, according to the laws, from which no deviation shall be allowed, either from fear of me, or through favour to the powerful, or for the purpose of supplying my treasury. I want no money raised by injustice."

And when, three years after, Canute died, too soon for the peace of the kingdom, and too early for the accomplishment of many wise designs—for he was under forty at his death—Hildelitha told to her children in winter evenings all the stories she had heard of good King Canute, and sang to them the ballads he had made: and Merdhin taught the elder ones to pray daily for his soul.

Made At The
Temple Press
Letchworth
Great Britain

NORTH CENTRAL COLLEGE
823.8M36F
C001
FEATS ON THE FJORD LONDON
3 2611 00067821 5